University of Alberta

Dietary Governance and Bodily Control in New Religious Movements: An Exploratory Model of Socially Imposed Anorexia.

by

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Abstract

This thesis develops an exploratory model of socially imposed anorexia within New Religious Movements (NRMs). Specifically, I argue for a three-fold model of social anorexia: directly imposed, doctrinally accepted, and mediated. Furthermore, I use instrumental case studies to explicate my model. The three NRMs that I examine are: Church Universal and Triumphant, Breatharianism, and The Family of Anne Hamilton-Byrne. In particular, I investigate the manner that these particular NRM leaders use dietary restriction as a mechanism of control. I borrow from psychological theories concerning individual anorexia as a starting point to examine social anorexia. Moreover, I locate my study within the sociology of the body as it relates to body ownership and governance.

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Introduction: Thesis Argument and Outline

Little academic work focuses on the role that dietary restrictions play in a religious context. Furthermore, the majority of the work that exists on this topic is concerned solely with the major world religions.[1] For instance, Bell and Walker-Bynum's respective studies of 'holy anorexia' discuss the role of dietary self-deprivation in achieving heightened religious status among medieval Catholic women (see Bell, 1985; Walker-Bynum, 1987). Within the academic study of new religious movements (NRMs) or alternative religions, even fewer works discuss the connection between diet and social control. For example, Bradley Whitsel's (2003) study of Church Universal and Triumphant overlooks the group's diet and eating habits, despite the pivotal role of food within the group. Likewise, an earlier contentious study (Lewis and Melton eds., 1994) also neglected to discuss dietary restriction in the context of group leadership and control of members.[2]

In my thesis I will elaborate and expand upon on an earlier work in which I argued that certain leaders of new religious movements (NRMs) or ideological groups employ dietary restrictions to regulate followers' (or members') bodies and minds in a similar manner to the ways in which anorectics use dietary restrictions to govern their lives (Meikle, 2005). I describe this regulation as '*imposed anorexia*,'[3] and I put

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[1] For a discussion of Jewish dietary rules, see Kemelman, 1971. For Christian dietary practices, see Gremillion, 1978 and Sack, 1999. For a discussion of Islamic dietary rules, see Denny, 1994: 283-285, and 361-363. For a discussion of Jain diet and fasting behaviour see Dundas, 1992 and Dundas, 1985. For Hindu dietary restrictions in relation to the caste system, see Dumont, 1970.

[2] For a critical discussion of Melton and Lewis's study of Church Universal and Triumphant, see Balch and Langdon, 1998.

[3] I use the term, anorexia, because of its association with psychological control dynamics (which I discuss later), not its association with a thin or emaciated body. Technically one who suffers from anorexia is an anorectic. The most commonly used term, however, is anorexic. For the sake of clarity, therefore, I follow common convention and use 'anorexic.'

forward a three-fold model of it. First, *directly imposed anorexia* occurs when the group leader dictates orders interpersonally (rather than through intermediaries) that restricts members' diets. Second, *doctrinally accepted anorexia* occurs when followers, under their own volition, assume the dietary rules and regulations of the group leader, with few if any direct orders from intermediaries. Doctrinally accepted anorexia occurs in 'audience cults,' whereby members receive the majority of group doctrine via mass media channels (Stark and Bainbridge, 1985: 26). Third, *mediated anorexia* occurs in a situation where the group leader prescribes dietary regulations to a subordinate who then passes on instructions to followers (Meikle, 2005). The three categories of social anorexia that I have developed are not mutually exclusive; rather, they serve as an outline for a model of member control through food regulation.

The objective of my thesis is to examine critically dietary practices and group doctrines that serve to impose stringent bodily discipline upon group members. I am aware that not all NRMs exhibit dietary restrictions, nor do all leaders wish to impose harsh mechanisms of control upon their followers. In some instances, however, dietary restrictions may reflect deep-seated issues of power and domination within group structure and operation. Following Michel Foucault (1979), we see that the body is a site of control and discipline, but in the circumstance of NRMs, the disciplinarians are ideological leaders rather than the state. Through harsh dietary regulations, these leaders enhance their influence over their followers' bodies (Meikle, 2005).

Outline

In *chapter one* I explore prior literature surrounding religion and diet. I briefly discuss the ways that scholars have examined diet and food in the context of religion. In addition, I argue that academics have overlooked diet as a control mechanism within religious studies. Next, I present the individual control model of anorexia and its relation to my model of socially imposed anorexia. I contrast personal dietary restraint with dietary restraint within high demand ideological groups.

I further my argument by introducing Janja Lalich's (2004) *Bounded Choice* model. Bounded choice attempts to explain member-leader relational dynamics in totalitarian organizations like Heaven's Gate and the Democratic Workers Party. I borrow aspects of the bounded choice model in order to explicate my imposed anorexia model. In particular, I focus on Lalich's discussion of control and social influence within groups. Moreover, I find her discussion of ideological groups as pseudo-familial structures useful for my case studies. Lalich only briefly discusses the role of charisma in member-leader relations, so I return to Weber's (1947) original charisma thesis and Benjamin Zablocki's (1981 and 2001) later work on charismatic relations.

Next, I introduce sociologist Bryan Turner (1992, 1995, and 1996) whose sociology of the body I use liberally throughout my thesis. Specifically, I focus on Turner's discussion of diet as regimentation and his Foucauldian insistence on the body as a site of discipline. Moreover, Turner (similar to Lalich) argues that one can liken ideological groups to fictive families. After my overview of Turner's key ideas

that are most relevant to my thesis, I briefly consider some of Turner's contemporaries in theorizing the body socially.

In *chapter two,* I describe my research methods. I describe in detail how I employed the method of grounded theory (GT) in thinking through my theoretical model. In addition, I illustrate how I used archival research strategies in the collection of my data. Furthermore, I discuss the method of using illustrative case studies and the manner in which I chose my cases. Next, I outline the methods that I used for each of my case studies. I detail both the data collection stages and the writing stages for each of my three case studies.

Chapter three is my case study on The Church Universal and Triumphant (CUT). I use this case study as an illustrative example of *directly imposed anorexia.* I review prior academic literature on CUT in addition to former member accounts and media articles. Within this chapter, I examine the history of the CUT movement, in addition to how the group conceptualizes the body. Using primarily the group's own publications I examine CUT's diet, dietary environment, fasting practices and communion rituals to support my argument that its leader (Elizabeth Clare Prophet) used dietary restriction as a mechanism to control her religious followers.

In *chapter four,* I undertake a case study of Breatharianism to illustrate the second point of my model— *doctrinally accepted anorexia.* I investigate the history of the Breatharian movement, looking first to its original founders (Wiley Brooks and Nancy Foss [1982]) and then to its subsequent leader (Ellen Graves, also known as Jasmuheen). Next, I describe the basic premise of Breatharianism, which is that humans are capable of living off air alone. I focus on the Breatharian pseudo-

scientific rationale for garnering nutrients from breathing. Moreover, I examine Breatharian publications that ultimately focus on bodily control for spiritual enlightenment. In addition, I concentrate on the so-called transitional diet that followers undergo to ready their bodies for living off air. I conclude that Breatharian doctrine as laid out by its leader Jasmuheen ultimately is a doctrine of bodily control similar to anorexia.

Chapter five is my case study of The Family of Anne Hamilton-Byrne. This case study illustrates the last point of my model concerning *mediated anorexia.* In this chapter, I examine the small ideological group of Anne Hamilton-Byrne. First, I lay out the beliefs of the group and the unique group structure that I argue allowed for the situation of mediated anorexia. Next, I investigate how Anne used others to carry out her orders of dietary restraint as a form of punishment and discipline. I also briefly consider the group's use of drugs for spiritual reasons. This is a unique case study as is involves children who were born or adopted into the group. Consequently, their membership in it was not necessarily voluntary.

In the concluding chapter of my thesis, I consider common themes that emerged within and among my three case studies. I provide again an overview of the theoretical framework that guides my thesis and I highlight what I have concluded or illustrated with each of my three case studies. Furthermore, I attempt to address issues or questions that may have arisen in my thesis. In addition, I consider issues that are beyond the scope of my thesis that I nevertheless feel are important. I propose several questions for further investigation and research.

Chapter One: Theoretical Perspectives

In addition to the model of imposed anorexia that I develop, I also draw upon theories of choice, charisma, and 'the body' in order to explicate my model. In particular, I use Janja Lalich's (2004) bounded choice model to aide in explaining member-leader relational dynamics within ideological groups. Specifically, Lalich's model is particularly useful in my chapter on Breatharians where members do not physically interact with their leader. The bounded choice model includes a brief discussion of charisma but I find it useful to return to Weber's original discussion of the concept as a foundation for examining leader authority.

In recent years, the sociological literature surrounding the body has greatly expanded. Above all, Foucault's pivotal work on the nature of the body as a disciplined entity paved the way for a new generation of scholars to examine the body in society. I employ Bryan Turner's (1996) sociology of the body most frequently in my thesis in order to create theoretical connections and to synthesize my imposed anorexia model with existing sociological scholarship. I do acknowledge, however, that Turner is certainly not the only sociologist/ philosopher of the body, and in this chapter, I briefly examine some of his contemporaries' contributions.

Traditional Notions of Food and Religion

Several themes are prevalent in the established religious studies literature concerning diet and religion. Paul Fieldhouse's (1995) survey of the role of diet in religion examines and illustrates several themes, such as the use of food to communicate with God or with otherworldly deities (Fieldhouse, 1995:120). In a religious context, communication typically occurs by means of a food sacrifice in the

form of a figurative act, such as receiving the Eucharist in Christianity. The Eucharist is merely a symbolic act in Protestant Christianity, whereas Catholic doctrine states that the bread and wine is transubstantiated into the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ (Fieldhouse, 1995: 103; Oxtoby, 1996: 220).

In addition, food practices augment group feelings of solidarity and identity (Fieldhouse, 1995: 120). As Fieldhouse notes, "[I]individuals who observe codified food rules make a public demonstration of belonging to a group, and every day provide themselves with a private affirmation of identification with the group. In this way, a sense of belonging is constantly reinforced" (Fieldhouse, 1995: 122). A further traditional notion concerning food and religion is that the function of food practices is to demonstrate one's faith (Ayoub, 1996: 382; Fieldhouse, 1995: 120). For instance, the codified religious dietary laws in Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism function to convey followers' submission to the reputed word of God. Moreover, religious followers reject food to symbolically and physically deny their own sense of worldliness (Amore and Ching, 1996: 219; Fieldhouse, 1995: 120). Religious devotees most often fast in order to refute the world and practice asceticism, and such fasting is a worldwide phenomenon that one sees in most world religions. [4]

Food practices relate to religion because they are a manifestation of separateness from inter-religious, intra-religious, and nonreligious groups (Fieldhouse, 1995: 120). The purpose of separation is evident not only in Jewish and Muslim dietary laws, but also (and especially) in Hindu caste rules that explicate who are able and not able to eat certain foods (Fieldhouse, 1995: 122; Narayanan, 1996: 89; Segal, 1995: 108). Currently, in the New Age spirituality movement, religious

[4] See Griffith, 1999 and 2004 for a discussion of the union of fasting and dieting in Christianity.

devotees evoke dietary practices, such as veganism or vegetarianism, in a spiritual context for environmental or ecological reasons (Fieldhouse, 1995: 120).

Fieldhouse's survey of food and diet within religion is useful, but I contend that his discussion is incomplete. For instance, he does not identify food and dietary restrictions as mechanisms of control. Baumgarten (1998), however, in his examination of ancient Jewish sectarian groups discusses food and diet as a mechanism of control within the Qumran community near the Dead Sea. Specifically the Qumran community used food restriction as a form of punishment for members who had failed to comply with the dictates of the group (Baumgarten, 1998: 392).[5]

Within the counter-cult literature, dietary deprivation within groups is only superficially mentioned, and quite often criticism seems to be directed towards vegetarian diets that were uncommon and therefore little understood in the West. For example, Parke and Stoner (1977) briefly discuss diet in relation to protein deficiency and malnutrition: "She [a former Unification Church member] claims that diet at Booneville [i.e. a church recruitment and training camp] is intentionally low in protein and high in carbohydrate content, the kind of diet she says can bring on emotional highs and lows by fouling up the body's blood sugar level" (Parke and Stoner, 1977: 211). Beyond such cursory mentions, the literature critical of so-called 'cults' and new religions fails to substantively address dietary regulation or deprivation. My thesis addresses this omission when I argue that certain high demand

[5] The Qumran movement emphasized the role of food as a central part of its community. Members took an oath that they would only partake of the pure food prepared within the community. The Qumran community even held expelled members to their oaths despite their exclusion from the group and the group's meals. Therefore, expelled members had to beg food from current members who risked expulsion themselves by giving them any (Baumgarten, 1998: 392).

ideological leaders use dietary restrictions in attempts to govern their followers' bodies (Meikle, 2005).

Theoretical Foundations

Anorexia Control Model

I propose a model of dietary restriction that is heavily influenced by the control theory of anorexia. The control theory of anorexia, however, is an individualized model that discusses dietary restrictions imposed by an individual upon his or her own body. The model that I proposed and now am elaborating upon is a social model of control by means of dietary restriction. The individual control model of anorexia is a starting point from which I build an exploratory social model of dietary restriction for the purpose of bodily control, and by extension, the control of the entire person (Meikle, 2005). By elaborating on and extending the individualized anorexia model, I conduct what Wagner and Berger (1985) identify as theory proliferation. Theory proliferation is a situation "... in which ideas from one theory are used to generate a theory concerned with a new or different sociological problem or data base" (Wagner and Berger, 1985: 707). I engage in theory proliferation when I expand ideas and theories of *individualized* food restriction onto the domain of *social* food restriction.

As I have argued elsewhere, I contend that certain ideological leaders, who demand that their followers obey extreme dietary restrictions and rules, are similar to anorexics who restrict their own diets in an endeavor to control their lives (Bruch, 1978; Bruch, 1997; Brumberg 1988; Lelwica, 1999; Meikle, 2005; Miles, 1995). In this context, anorexia nervosa is a totalizing disease that wholly encompasses the

anorexic's life. She makes basic, everyday decisions based on her need for self-regimentation. The anorexic feels a false sense of control over all areas of her life, because she is able to successfully regulate her body and its desires. [6] I argue that just as the anorexic uses dietary restrictions to control her body, so do some ideological leaders use dietary instructions and restrictions in a similar manner to control their follower's bodies (Meikle, 2005: 44).

The feelings of complete self-governance that an anorexic feels while restricting food intake are commanding and total. The minimal act of refusing the body basic physical requirements produces a feeling of domination over it and, by extension, over the self (Lelwica, 1999: 89). The theory that extreme regulation over diet creates a sense of total management over the anorexic's life is well supported in both psychological and sociological literature on eating disorders. Anorexics use their diets as the one part of their lives over which they have complete and utter control, and then by extension are able to feel a sense of power over other aspects of their lives. For instance, one anorexic describes this feeling of authority: " 'I felt powerful as an anorexic. Controlling my body yielded an illusion of control over my life.... I had reduced my world to a plate of steamed carrots, and over this tiny kingdom I proudly crowned myself queen'" (quoted in Lelwica, 1999: 11).

The control theory of anorexia that includes notions of bodily domination and self-regulation is useful in conceptualizing the regulation that some high commitment ideological leaders impose upon their members through diet and food

[6] I use the pronoun she, because the vast majority of anorexics are female, although males are increasingly becoming anorexic. In this analysis, I do not pay particular attention to gender differences, because ideological leaders apply the doctrines of dietary restriction to both men and women. Further study, however, might discover differential dietary governance for men and women.

restrictions. The control theory of anorexia is a model of individual psychology, whereas I am proposing a social model of dietary restriction. The utility, however, in drawing analogies to the anorexia model is that both models (individual and social) use dietary restriction as a method of bodily control. Specifically, in both circumstances either the individual herself or the leader denies basic nutrients that are necessary for survival. This denial creates a state of dependence. In the situation of individual anorexia, the anorexic is dependent upon her disease for each decision and action that she undertakes. Every decision that she makes is carefully weighted against her desire to avoid food. She spends the majority of every day contemplating how to avoid her next meal, calculating calories consumed versus calories expended, and devising plans to avoid the next social interaction that involves food (Orbach, 1986: 14).

In the social model of anorexia, followers become dependent upon their leader to make all of their decisions in relation to food but also in relation to other aspects of their lives. By giving up control of their most basic need, followers give their leaders the authority to control them. Although in the individual model, the disease controls the individual, and in the social model, the leader controls the individual, the mechanism of control in both remains dietary restriction. I, therefore, utilize the individual control model as a theoretical starting point in which to explore dietary control within a social context.

Bounded Choice Model

Janja Lalich's (2004) bounded choice model attempts to explain involvement in high demand beliefs. Lalich argues that leaders of high demand ideological groups

create highly structured environments for their followers. She mentions food as one primal need that leaders often control in order to further structure the lives of their followers (Lalich, 2004: 239). This emphasis on food as a control mechanism relates to anorexia nervosa where the individual structures his or her own environment using dietary restriction as a mechanism of control. Bounded choice then is a narrowing of collective choice whereas individual anorexia is a narrowing of individual choice, but if we examine these two models concurrently we can characterize socially imposed anorexia as a narrowing of collective choice based on the same principals of control evidenced in individual anorexia. In this circumstance, however, the leaders are acting upon the bodies of their followers.

Lalich draws heavily upon Giddens's theory of structuration to explicate how leaders restrict their followers' choices so successfully in these groups. Lalich adapts Giddens's work to apply to life within restrictive groups. The structural dimensions of her bounded choice model are three-fold. The first of Lalich's structural dimensions is charismatic authority, which I discuss later. The second structural dimension is transcendent belief— a mainstay of NRMs and New Age[7] beliefs in general. Lalich sees transcendent belief as two-fold, consisting of a promise and a path (Lalich, 2004: 226). In particular, in high demand groups often the charismatic leader offers his or her followers a promise of some form of salvation, usually other-worldly. Furthermore, the leader usually outlines a manner or 'path' for reputedly achieving this salvation. Lalich examines two case studies, Heaven's Gate and the Democratic Worker's Party (DWP), both where leaders were creators of new belief systems that

[7] Melton (1986) defines the New Age movement as ". . . the attempt to find the social, religious, political, and cultural convergence between the new Eastern and mystical religions and the religious disenchantment of many Westerners" (Melton, 1986: 107).

they claimed as the way to salvation (Lalich, 2004: 224). In the DWP, the supposed path to salvation was political revolution whereas in Heaven's Gate the 'promise' of salvation required extra-terrestrial space travel (Lalich, 2004: 123; 226).

Lalich lists systems of influence and control as the third structural dimension that inhibit followers from making personal choices and facilitates their making constricted choices (Lalich, 2004: 222-223). Specifically, Lalich argues that there are three crucial characteristics of this dimension of control and social influence: ". . . self-monitoring, peer monitoring, and modeling oneself after approved behaviour, exemplified by the leader, the ideal of the belief system, and other members" (Lalich, 2004: 230). According to the bounded choice model, these three structural dimensions work in concert to inhibit members' life choices and enforce the goals of the group. I contend that these structural dimensions are acting upon followers in the groups that I examine. Most importantly, however, is the third dimension of control and social influence, which embraces food monitoring and dietary regimentation.

Furthermore, in Heaven's Gate and the DWP the leaders assumed a parental role, albeit one of extreme control. First, the leaders provided the group with everything from housing to major decisions, and Lalich characterizes this form of leadership as totalistic (Lalich, 2004: 238). Next, the leaders took on the role of parent when they intervened in all aspects of their followers' lives. "Members submitted to that authority as one does to a parent— sometimes with guilt or shame, sometimes with anxiety, sometimes with relief, and almost always with a mixture of love and fear" (Lalich, 2004: 239). Last, Lalich identifies a regression of followers into childlike roles, particularly in relation to their primal needs. For example, leaders

provided followers with food, which led to a heightened dependency on authority. Pseudo-familial characteristics are also present in the case studies that I examine, and I find Lalich's analysis useful along with Turner's discussion of familial feeding and bonding that I discuss shortly.

To better understand the influence that group leaders have over their followers I consider the role of charisma in leader-follower relations. Lalich stresses the importance of charismatic authority in her bounded choice model, when she contends that "Without the leader, there would be no draw, no call, no promise of an ideal. And without devotees responding to that call, there would be no group, no set of coordinated activities, and no followers granting the leader the authority to rule" (Lalich, 2004: 226). I use Weber (1947) and Benjamin Zablocki's (1980 and 2001) discussion of charismatic relationships to facilitate an understanding of the relationship that exists between and among followers and leaders in high intensity NRMs. A closer examination of charismatic authority is necessary in order to elicit a better understanding of the complete devotion that group members feel towards their leader. This devotion is so intense that followers will subsist on marginally sufficient amounts of food, often placing themselves in physical harm of starvation or nutritional deficiency.

Charismatic Influence

I examine charisma in light of Weber's discussion of it as a type of authority. What role does charismatic authority play in control-based interactions? Specifically, how does charismatic authority affect follower obedience to such things as leader

imposed dietary prohibitions? Weber (1947) developed the concept of charisma as an ideal type of authority. Weber's definition of charisma is as follows:

> The term 'charisma' will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual is treated as a leader (Weber, 1947: 358-359).

Following Weber we see charisma not as a personality type, but rather as type of authority.

The leader is only charismatic if his or her followers view the person as possessing unique qualities (Weber, 1947: 359). In the context of NRMs, followers in effect bestow charisma onto their leader. Followers' belief in their leader's message is necessary to form a charismatic relationship. If followers do not acknowledge the reputedly divine nature of their leader's message, then a charismatic relationship will not ensue. Sociologist of religion Bryan Wilson articulated the importance of followers' acceptance in order for a charismatic relationship to form:

> . . . [I]f a man runs naked down the street proclaiming that he alone can save others from impending doom, and if he immediately wins a following, then he is a charismatic leader: a *social relationship* has come into being. If he does not win a following, he is simply a *lunatic* (Wilson, 1975: 7, emphasis added).

Usually only followers see their leader as charismatic; therefore, only they subject themselves to his or her authority. To an individual outside the group— who does not acknowledge the divine message of the leader—the authority that the leader has over his or her followers may seem unwarranted.

Weber discussed followers' veneration of the charismatic leader as complete devotion (Weber, 1947: 359). Complete personal devotion to a charismatic leader is integral to my thesis, since followers must be devoted to one in order to obey rules and restrictions regarding their own personal diets. A strong basis to the charismatic relationship is necessary in order for devotees to place their 'primal' needs so confidently into the hands of their leader.

Zablocki defines charisma in the classic Weberian sense as a condition of devotion (Zablocki, 2001: 182). He stresses that in order to understand charisma we must examine the relationship that the leader has with his or her followers. Zablocki also acknowledges that charismatic influence is a poorly understood concept (Zablocki, 2001: 182). It seems that the concept of charisma is central to the question of control. Why are some charismatic leaders (such as David Koresh, Jim Jones, and Marshall Applewhite) able to influence their followers to such an extent that followers take their own lives?

In his book, *Alienation and Charisma* (1980), Zablocki explores charismatic authority in contemporary America communes. He provides a functionalist explanation for the concept:

> Thus, the primary function of charisma is to provide structured opportunities for the investment of self. The primary function of the charismatic leader is to

provide values that evoke in each follower the desire to invest self and, having invested, to refrain from withdrawing self again (Zablocki, 1980: 274).

Zablocki discusses charismatic authority as a relational variable that functions to maintain group dynamics.

Zablocki identifies five levels of charisma in his study of 120 communes. The five levels are exemplary, policy, executive, normative, and absolute. The latter level of charisma— absolute charisma— is most relevant to my discussion of dietary control. In level five charisma, members invest themselves so heavily in the collectivity that they turn over every decision to the charismatic authority (Zablocki, 1980: 280). Zablocki contends that absolute charisma is ". . . capable of demanding a complete investment of the self. For there to be no private identity left to make decisions has a strong appeal to many people " (Zablocki, 1980: 281). Zablocki describes a loss of personal independence and autonomy or in colloquial terms a state of mind control.

Furthermore, because the charismatic leader receives his or her authority from reputedly other-worldly sources (Weber, 1947: 361), members feel that to question the leader is to question the 'divine' or to question God (Zablocki, 1980: 281). Moreover, members often feel compelled not to question the authority of the leader because they have devoted so much of themselves to the cause (Zablocki, 1980: 281). In the high demand NRMs that I examine, the notion of charismatic authority is a useful heuristic device to explain the acceptance by group members of their leaders' commands, and their inability to challenge them. Charisma, however, is not the only explanatory device that I use to try to understand follower compliance to dietary

restriction in NRMs. I also make use of sociological theories of the body in order to expand upon my imposed anorexia model.

Sociology of the Body

Traditionally, the body has been a neglected site of study within the humanities and social sciences, as Descartes's concept of mind/body dualism has dominated the social sciences for the last few hundred years. Cartesian dualism presupposes that the mind and body are mutually exclusive; therefore, scholars typically examine them within different disciplines and different realms. The mind is the domain of the social sciences and the body is the domain of medicine[8] and the natural sciences (Turner, 1992: 32). Recently, however, sociologists of the body have rejected Cartesian dualism and stressed instead a philosophical monism that denies the separation of the mind and body (McGuire, 1990: 283; Synnott, 1993: 32; Turner, 1992: 32-33).

The French philosopher John-Paul Sartre (1943) was influential in conceptualizing the body as the self, whereas Cartesian dualism traditionally accentuated the mind as the self (Synnott, 1993: 32). Sartre's conception of the body as self was an important development in the conception of the body within the humanities and social sciences. Likewise, McGuire (1990) and O'Neill (1985) are strong proponents of philosophical monism; indeed, they both speculate that we are hesitant to reject the Cartesian duality because we privilege the power of thought and ideas over the power of the body. In essence, we imagine ourselves controlled

[8] Psychiatry is the exception to this generalization. Psychiatry is a specialized area of medicine that focuses on the mind, but does so primarily by analyses of the brain (which, of course is part of the body).

through our minds, ideas, and relationships, because to conceptualize control through the body gives the impression of slavery (McGuire, 1990: 291; O'Neill 1985:48).

Bryan Turner is one of the main contemporary sociologists of the body and he has written several books arguing for the return of the body as subject (Turner, 1992; 1995; 1996). Following Foucault, Turner situates the body as a site of control and discipline through the practices of regulation, asceticism, training, and denial (Turner, 1996: 185). In my thesis, I use Turner's discussion of the body as the site of regimentation and control to inform the theoretical framework of the body.

Turner (1996) discusses diet and the body in terms of regimentation. Specifically, Turner argues that parents' secure control of their children's bodies through a regime of dietary management: "A regimen is a government of the body and the forms of eating imposed by parents [leaders] on their children [followers] can thus be seen as an aspect of domestic government or a regime for the control of bodies" (Turner, 1996: 189-190).

In my thesis, I extend Turner's discussion of parental dietary regimentation onto leader-follower relational dynamics. Therefore, Turner's parents become ideological leaders in my analysis and his children become followers. By extrapolating Turner's familial framework onto a religious situation, I draw upon prior literature related to the notion of NRMs as 'fictive families,' such as Lalich's familial framework as mentioned above.[9] Specifically, the groups that I examine (with the exception of one) lived communally, and the leaders held a parental-like

[9] For prior discussion of religious groups as families see Cartwright and Kent, 1992; Dupertuis, 1983, and Persinger, Carrey, and Suess, 1980.

authority over their followers. Moreover, in two of the groups, followers referred to the leader as mother or some other parental variant.

Turner views himself as a Foucauldian, and Turner's contemporaries have contributed a great deal of scholarly work to the academic literature on 'the body' under the same umbrella of Foucauldian scholarship. I briefly consider some of these key theorists and while I do make use of certain of their concepts, ultimately I return to Turner's sociology of the body because his discussion is succinct and his theories are the most closely related to and relevant to my own thesis.

Susan Bordo (1993) stresses that feminist scholarship discovered 'the body' as subject before Foucault and post-modern theorists did. She argues that feminist theorists identified the body as a sight of struggle, and although Foucault conceptualized the body as an object of power and surveillance, feminists already had theorized the body as subject (Bordo, 1993: 17; 27). Likewise, Judith Butler (1990) describes Foucault's concept of the body as inherently passive, and she argues for a theoretical concept of the body that acknowledges and challenges gender identity (Butler, 1990: 129; 141; Fox, 1999: 116).

Nicholas Fox (1999) contends that Foucault identified the body as a "site and target of power," but he questions which 'body' Foucault and subsequent Foucauldian scholars actually were discussing (Fox, 1999: 113). Fox raises this issue because he identifies different concepts of the body and insists that theorists often are not clear about which one they were analyzing. First, he discusses the physical biological body, but he views it as an unacceptable notion of the body because power does not act on its biological dimensions (Fox, 1999: 114). Next, he considers the body as natural but

with cultural experience, and he concludes that the natural body is "beyond discourse and thus unknowable." Finally, Fox argues that one can conceive of the body within Foucauldian scholarship as a body-without-organs (BWO). The BWO is a philosophical surface conceptualized by Deleuze and Guattari that exists between the social and natural worlds (Fox, 1999: 123; Fox, 2002: 351). The BWO is a unified body that is the creation of knowledge and power and as such, it is the site of contestation and struggle (Fox, 2002: 351). Furthermore, it is a social body although it exists in physical space (Fox, 1999: 114-115). Fox conceptualizes the BWO as "[t]he self-inside-the-body . . . " (Fox, 2002: 352) that is the non-physical part of the body that is nevertheless embodied.

Elizabeth Grosz (1995) identifies two main theoretical paradigms in relation to the body. She discusses the inscriptive body as ". . . the body as a surface on which social law, morality, and values are inscribed" (Grosz, 1995: 33). The other paradigm to which Grosz refers is the concept of the 'lived body,' which concerns itself with the lived occurrence of the body (Grosz, 1995: 33):

> By 'body' I understand a concrete, material, animate organization of flesh, organs, nerves, and skeletal structure, which are given a unity, cohesiveness, and form through the psychical and social inscription of the body's surface. The body is, so to speak, organically, biologically 'incomplete'; it is indeterminate, amorphous, a series of uncoordinated potentialities that require social triggering, ordering and long-term 'administration' (Grosz, 1995: 104).

The concept of the 'lived body' is most relevant to my thesis since I discuss actual events, and concrete happenings of people with real physical bodies. Although Grosz

acknowledges the physicality of the body, she tends to favour, like Fox, a philosophical notion of it.

Sociologist Meredith McGuire (1990) emphasizes the need to consider the body in social science research— in particular in the sociology of religion: "Our research strategies need to take into account that believers (and nonbelievers) are not merely disembodied spirits, but that they experience a material world *in and through their bodies*" (McGuire, 1990: 294 emphasis added). McGuire stresses that because humans are embodied, we conceptualize anything that happens to our bodies as happening to ourselves (McGuire, 1990: 284). I concur with McGuire's notion of embodiment. The primary focus of my research is dietary restriction, which is a *physical* event that people *experience* happening to their biological bodies.

Ultimately, I conceptualize the body 'as person' when I argue that control of the body is control of the person. I include the brief overview of contemporary theorists of the body for the purposes of elaboration and to acknowledge that Turner is certainly not the only theorist of the body. I return to Turner, however, because I feel his theory of embodiment is the most relevant to my discussion of the body within NRMs, particularly his emphasis on understanding ". . . the communal nature of embodiment" (Turner, 1995: 235). Turner acknowledges the work of his contemporaries and he stresses a theoretical strategy, posited by Wagner (1984), which allows him to incorporate and build upon existing research (Turner, 1995: 214). I use a similar theoretical approach when I adapt and draw upon Turner's (and other's) sociology of the body for my model of imposed anorexia. Particularly, I build

upon Turner's discussion of diet as a form of familial regimentation, in addition to his argument that the body is the ultimate site of discipline.

Conclusion

My theoretical perspective (like Turner's) is somewhat diverse in nature as far as I combine concepts from several theorists and disciplines. Primarily, my model of imposed anorexia builds upon existing social-psychological theories surrounding eating disorders, as far as I consider aspects of individual theories of *bodily* control and explore how those aspects function within a social situation of *other-bodily* control. I use Janja Lalich's bounded choice model for a framework to explain leader-follower relations in the high commitment groups, which I examine. Furthermore, the bounded choice model stresses the highly structured nature of NRMs in a way similar, I argue, to the intensely structured dietary environment present in anorexia. I marry these two models of structural control to inform my model of socially imposed anorexia, which involves dietary regimentation imposed upon followers by their charismatic leader.

Moreover, the bounded choice model includes a pseudo-familial analysis of NRMs that I find useful. In particular, Lalich's discussion of leaders controlling the primal needs of their followers as would parents ties into Turner's discussion of family feeding and the role of food as bonding insofar as one can conceptualize NRM leaders as fictive parents attempting to control their followers' basic needs.

Furthermore, I use theories of charismatic influence to inform my imposed anorexia model. In individual anorexia, the individual is her own limiter and own authoritarian leader (as some might contend that the disease is). Conversely, in

socially imposed anorexia the ideological leader uses the mechanism of dietary control, facilitated through a charismatically rooted authoritative relationship with his or her followers.

Taken together, I engage in 'theory proliferation' (Wagner and Berger, 1985: 707) when I elaborate upon and borrow from Bryan Turner's ideas about the sociology of the body, embodiment, and control of the body. Moreover, I also look to other theorists of the body to supplement and develop my discussion.

Chapter 2: Methods

Grounded Theory

The main methodological umbrella that I used in writing my thesis is grounded theory (GT), originally developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967. GT is a based on collecting and analyzing data to inductively build mid-range theories that explain the data (Charmaz, 2000: 509). In recent years, Charmaz (2000) has developed what she refers to as constructivist GT, which is an attempt to get away from the positivistic and objectivist assumptions of the original GT developed by Glaser and Strauss and their subsequent independent grounded theories (Charmaz, 2000: 510). Constructivist GT, "[a]ssumes the relativism of multiple social realties, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and viewed, and aims toward interpretive understandings of subjects' meanings" (Charmaz, 2000: 510).

Moreover, constructivist GT is based on a three-fold argument. First, strategies and methods of data collection are flexible and adaptive. Second, the primary analytical focus should be on interpretive meaning, because it is meaning that furthers analytical understandings. Finally, one need not be a positivist to use GT (Charmaz, 2000: 510). Constructivist GT does not purport to deliver objective, scientific, verifiable, reliable, nor generalizable theories. Rather, constructivist GT produces concepts that may be useful in explicating an interpretative understanding of different social phenomena in other situations (Charmaz, 2000: 524). I used a GT method to develop the three-fold model of *imposed anorexia*. I started collecting data on diet in NRMs and from there I devised a theoretical model based on the

observations I had made on the data. In my thesis research, I attained more data on the groups, and I analyzed them more thoroughly.

Theory Proliferation

In addition to using a GT approach to theorizing, I also engaged in what Wagner and Berger (1985) termed theory proliferation (Wagner and Berger, 1985: 707). In this regard, I used the existing literature of the sociology of the body as a starting point from which to build and synthesize my theoretical model.

While writing my thesis, I used several methods to aide in creating conceptual linkages between different theorists and my own theory. First, I engaged in an extensive literature review of pertinent literature on the body. I spent weeks reading and taking notes on various philosophers and theorists of the body whom one of my committee members had suggested I read. During this initial literature review, I created several "mind-maps" to visually connect concepts of the body through time and space, between and among theorists. While reading, I paid particular attention to any mention of anorexia or bodily control and discipline. I already had come across the work of Bryan Turner before this more extensive literature review, yet I returned to Turner for a closer reading of his main text, *The Body and Society* (1996). I read and re-read Turner's works while making comprehensive notes in order to better grasp his conceptualizations of the body.

Next, I conducted a literature review of sources about eating disorders and anorexia in particular. I revisited some texts that I had used previously for my initial article on imposed anorexia and I found other supplemental sources that I had over-looked. The process of studying anorexia literature was difficult intellectually and

personally. First, the literature surrounding anorexia is scattered across several disciplines: psychology, sociology, clinical medicine, social psychology, and psychiatry. I had to discern what aspects of anorexia were most pertinent to my thesis; therefore, I focused on the social interpretations of anorexia rather than the biomedical ones.

My next hurdle involved disengaging personally from my readings. A number of the books that I read included biographical case studies of anorexic patients, which I often found difficult to read because of my own personal experiences with anorexia as a teenager. Ultimately, I worried that reading about anorexia might somehow push me back into a preoccupied state concerning food or body image. This was a real concern that I dealt with by taking an extended amount of time to complete my readings on anorexia. I found this strategy helped me to overcome feeling 'consumed' with anorexia.

After considering the theoretical aspects of my thesis, I commenced my research on the groups that I had chosen to examine. The process of theorizing was not linear, but I continually returned to work I had read or written previously. Furthermore, initial feedback from committee members forced me to revise earlier assumptions and to revisit my thoughts and analyses of imposed anorexia.

Case Studies

I use case studies of NRMS as my units of analysis in order to examine the larger issue of dietary control. In this regard, I am using a type of case study that Stake (2000) has defined as instrumental, "... if a particular case is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization. The case is of

secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else" (Stake, 2000: 437). Therefore, I use case studies to examine how group leaders use dietary practices as a mechanism of control.

I had no formal sampling method for choosing the three groups that I chose, nor do I purport that these cases are somehow representative of all NRMs. Rather, I chose these groups after coming across food-related issues in my work as a research assistant in the Stephen A. Kent Collection on Alternative Religions. For three summers I worked on this collection, archiving, cataloguing, and organizing. This work gave me a substantial knowledge base on group practices and doctrines in several NRMs. Therefore, my sampling strategy was more of a long-term selection process whereby I scanned any document I came across for mention of food or diet related issues. If I found something of interest, then I photocopied the document and saved it. In addition, I conducted a search of the archives for any NRM that had specific policies or doctrines relating to diet. Moreover, I benefited from Dr. Kent's knowledge of NRMs, and he was able to direct me towards groups that he was aware had dietary restraints. For example, Dr. Kent directed me to look at the Family of Anne Hamilton-Byrne because he had come across the group in his own work on child abuse.

Berg (2001) stresses the importance of triangulating sources to reduce possible sources of error when using archival methods (Berg, 2001: 203). Although my intention in using triangulation is not validation in the positivist sense, rather as Flick (1998) emphasizes, triangulation adds depth and complexity to any study (Flick, 1998: 231). Following the suggestion of triangulation, I attempted to use several

different types of sources for each case study. In some instances, however, use of different sources was not possible. For example, I had only one book and two media articles on The Family of Anne Hamilton- Byrne; therefore, it was not possible to triangulate sources. I did acknowledge, however, the one-sidedness of my sources.

In most cases, I analyzed primary group documents, that is, documents that the religious group had produced— such as pamphlets, newsletters, books, audio-tapes, and group websites. Second, I examined information from secondary sources, such as former member accounts, current member accounts, legal cases, police reports, and information about the group from external sources. Next, I considered commercial media accounts, which include "... any written, drawn, or recorded (video or audio) material produced for general or mass consumption" (Berg, 2001: 191).

I chose not to interview current or former members of the groups that I studied. My primary reason for choosing not to conduct interviews was due to the international location of the groups that I examine, as well as financial constraints. I did use, however, former member accounts in my thesis.

Within the study of NRMs, there is debate about the trustworthiness of both member and former member accounts. Some scholars such as Lewis (1989) contend that former members' accounts are skewed, because generally apostates are disgruntled and may have a desire for revenge, or retribution for time or money lost to their former group. In contrast, Balch and Langdon (1998) argue that it is worthwhile to use ex-member accounts in social science research. Based on his studies of Heaven's Gate and the Love Family, Balch concludes that defectors are trustworthy.

He found few inconsistencies between his own ethnographic field notes and interviews that he conducted months later with ex-members (Balch and Langdon, 1998: 201). Furthermore, researchers can corroborate ex-member accounts against other ex-member and current member accounts (Balch, 1998: 201).

Case One- Church Universal and Triumphant

The first group that I examined was the Church Universal and Triumphant. I started my analysis of the group by conducting an academic literature search. Only a handful of scholarly studies focus on CUT, and there is debate about the academic integrity of some of these studies. Next, I moved onto the considerably more intensive task of sorting through CUT publications, searching for any references to diet, food, or the body. Fortunately, some of CUT's publications included indexes, which aided my research. The group, however, produced an enormous volume of publications over the past few decades, and sorting through the group's publications took a significant amount of time. After considering academic and primary group documents I then looked for any media accounts of CUT or any publications written by former or current group members.

Following my collection and review of literature on and about CUT, I employed a method of qualitative coding to draw out the main issues concerning diet and control within the group. Once I established several themes that surfaced in CUT in relation to food, I created a mind map to visually link key themes. I found that employing mind maps was a useful strategy for me in terms of both summarizing and planning. I was able to graphically illustrate the main concepts in addition to creating the beginnings of an outline.

The process of writing was quite straightforward, as I had created a detailed outline in addition to the several pages of notes that I had taken on CUT literature. During the writing stage, I referred back to both my notes and the original sources to ensure consistency.

Case two- Breatharianism

My data collection strategy for my case study on Breatharianism was significantly different from my CUT strategy insofar as published academic accounts of the group do not exist. Furthermore, with the exception of one book, the majority of my sources on Breatharianism are either media accounts or group-produced publications that I printed from the Internet. The paucity of published information on Breatharianism at first seemed daunting, but I soon discovered that the Breatharian leader Jasmuheen was a prolific writer. Jasmuheen's official website includes numerous articles that she has written regarding the philosophy of Breatharianism and the basis of not eating.

After I completed the data collection portion of my methodology I set out to read and take notes on my gathered sources in much the same manner as I had in my investigation of CUT. Again I coded for key themes and employed mind maps and detailed outlines to create conceptual linkages.

Case three- The Family of Anne Hamilton-Byrne

My third case study was an examination of The Family of Anne Hamilton-Byrne. As I previously mentioned, I only had one book about this group as well as a few short media articles about the Family. I employed a 'close reading' tactic whereby I read and re-read while taking specific notes wherever necessary. I do

acknowledge in my chapter on The Family that my sources are sparse, which I consider a limitation in my analysis of The Family. Unfortunately, however, The Family remains little studied both in academia and in journalism. Therefore, I had no choice but to work with the limited resources that I had.

Chapter Three: Church Universal and Triumphant— Directly Imposed Anorexia

Introduction

A striking example of imposed dietary anorexia appears in the doctrines and practices of Church Universal and Triumphant (CUT). Its leader (until 1996), Elizabeth Clare Prophet, claimed to channel messages from the great ascended masters (such as Jesus and the Buddha). Through these messages, Prophet gave her followers direct orders about what they should eat, how they should eat, and even where they should sit while eating.

I examine two related aspects of CUT and food. First, in this chapter, I present and discuss CUT's dietary practices. In particular, I examine CUT's doctrines about the body and how these doctrines translated into certain dietary behaviours (such as fasting) and avoidances. Second, I consider Elizabeth Clare Prophet's motivations and intentions in subjecting her followers to extreme dietary restrictions. I argue that Prophet attempted to govern her members' completely. By controlling her followers' bodies, Prophet in effect controlled their very being. In making this argument, I follow McGuire (1990) in arguing that the body *is* the self. Therefore, to control another's body is to control another's sense of self.

Although CUT members' participation in dietary restrictions might suggest that I should view group members as having accepted her control of their food, I include Prophet in the 'direct imposition' category because of her face-to-face contact with those of her followers who lived communally with her or who saw her at events or retreats.

Literature Review

The most recent academic study of CUT is Bradley Whitsel's (2003) book, *The Church Universal and Triumphant: Elizabeth Clare Prophet's Apocalyptic Movement.* Whitsel's focus is on CUT's development into a millennial movement in the 1980s, as well as the group's response after Prophet's prophecy of nuclear war failed to come true in 1990. Whitsel traces CUT's history as well as the influences of the I Am Movement and the occult movement on CUT beliefs. In addition, Whitsel provides an analysis of the ever-changing political views of the group. For example, he notes Clare Prophet's support of anti-communist movements as well as her ties to conservative right-winger, Lyndon Larouche. Whitsel traces the catastrophic tendencies of CUT throughout both Elizabeth and Mark's leadership years in relation to the group's conspiratorial outlook. For example, Whitsel examines CUT's views both about the government creating AIDS and about UFOS being the result of collusion between aliens and the government (Whitsel, 2003: 100-104).

Throughout his book, Whitsel stresses the absolute control that Clare Prophet had over her followers. He contends that she did so by using her special position as a reputed messenger of the ascended masters (Whitsel, 2003: 56 and 93). Although Whitsel takes a neutral stance on CUT he does give a somewhat one-sided representation of the anti-cult movement in the 1980s. He traces negative attitudes towards CUT to the aftermath of the Jonestown tragedy in 1978 (Whitsel, 2003: 55).

Whitsel also fails to mention the role of the body or food within the group, most likely due to his background as a political scientist. The focus of his analysis is

political and, as such, he provides only a cursory overview of religious belief and doctrine.

Religious belief and doctrine received more attention in a 1993 team study that James Lewis and Gordon Melton coordinated under the umbrella of the Association of World Academics for Religious Education (AWARE). CUT financially supported AWARE, and its one-sided, positive portrayal of CUT, has led to considerable criticism. Balch and Langdon (1998), who took part in the study, criticized the AWARE team for failing to critically examine the group, and stated that the team of scholars treated the study as an apology in the wider religious freedom versus cult issue.[10] Balch and Langdon alleged that the AWARE study failed to examine charges of "psychological coercion, abuses of power, questionable economic practices, [and] financial exploitation of members" (Balch and Langdon, 1998: 192).

Michael York's (1995) article on CUT is similar to the AWARE study. York focused on the New Age aspect of CUT practices and beliefs in addition to a brief overview of the New Age movement in general. One gets the impression that York's article is an attempt to frame CUT in as positive a light as possible. He writes, "Though one may not agree with their politics, other-worldly theology and chosen puritanical path, these are decent people that [sic] any thinking person would enjoy having as neighbours" (York, 1995: 74). York failed to examine, however, the same issues that the AWARE study also ignored.

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[10] The contemporary study of new religious movements is a heavily divided discipline. On one side are the so-called "counter cultists" who tend to view new religions in a somewhat suspicious light. On the opposing side are the so-called "cult apologists" who tend to view new religious movements as world religions in their infancy. Overall, the gaze of the cult apologists is positive. Several issues divide these two scholarly camps, such as: religious freedom, abuse, harm, free will, and brainwashing. For a discussion of these and other areas of contention see: Lalich, 2001; Langone, 2000; Palmer, 2001 and Robbins and Zablocki, 2001.

A study that does examine critical issues about the group is Kenneth and Talita Paolini's (2000) memoir of the time that they spent in CUT, supplemented with an overview of group doctrine and belief. Due to their insider status as former members, the Paolini's book is useful for descriptions of everyday life within the group and the inner workings of CUT. Kenneth Paolini spent several years as a body-guard to Elizabeth Clare Prophet, so his knowledge of Prophet's personal life is extensive.

The Paolinis discuss their lives when they were in their early twenties, which they spent in CUT. They chronicle their time at CUT's Summit University as well as their decisions to both join CUT and subsequently leave. Moreover, they trace the history of CUT doctrines back through the I Am movement and the larger theosophical practice of ascended masters. In contrast to other studies of CUT, the Paolinis' book is a critical examination of the group to which they devoted their early adult years.

History of Church Universal and Triumphant

CUT evolved from a small sectarian movement named Summit Lighthouse, which Elizabeth Clare Prophet's second husband, Mark Prophet founded, in the late 1950s. Mark Prophet was highly influenced by the I AM movement, which in turn was rooted within the theosophical tradition.[11] Guy and Edna Ballard began the I AM movement in the United States in the 1930s by blending the belief in ascended masters with a mixture of right-wing ideology and theosophical teachings (Whitsel, 2003: 23). Mark Prophet was familiar with I AM philosophy through his

[11] For an insider's account of, the I AM Movement see Bryan, 1940. For an overview of the theosophical tradition, see Ellwood, 1983. See also Ballard 1939 and Blavatsky, 1886.

involvement in an offshoot group called Lighthouse of Freedom (Whitsel, 2003: 28). Most likely Guy Ballard and Baird Spalding's 1924 book, *Life and Teachings of Masters of the Far East,* influenced Mark Prophet's original teachings regarding ascended masters (Shmook, n.d: 1-10).[12] In this book, they laid out the ideas of ascended masters who were one with God, and most importantly, the idea of messengers on earth who could commune with the ascended masters (Shmook, n.d.: 1-10).

While Mark Prophet was founding his new religious movement, his future wife, Elizabeth Clare Wulf, was still in her adolescent years. Elizabeth attended a Christian Science church in her childhood. Her mother introduced her to theosophical writings at a young age; in particular, her mother was well versed in the theosophical writings of Helene Blavatsky (Paolini, 2000: 241). Elizabeth's religious environment as a child probably contributed to her easy acceptance of Mark Prophet's claims of communing with ascended masters. Elizabeth met Mark Prophet in the early 1960s, when both she and Prophet were married to other spouses. Believing that they were twin flames— the souls' counterparts from the white fire core of the I Am presence[13] — as well as the two witnesses from the Book of Revelation, they both divorced their respective spouses and married (Paolini and Paolini, 2000: 242; Shmook, n.d: 3-5).

Between 1961 and 1966, Elizabeth trained with Mark Prophet to be a messenger to the ascended masters, and after her discipleship, she supposedly became a messenger for the Great White Brotherhood (Shmook, n.d: 3-19; Whitsel, 2003:

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[12] Kathy Schmook's manuscript is unpublished with separate pagination for each chapter.
[13] Guy and Edna Ballard developed the concept of twin flames based on Ancient Greek mythology. Twin flames are attracted because they are the masculine and feminine components of the same I AM presence (Shmook, n.d.: 3-5).

21). Prophet and Prophet hoped to "proclaim the New Age of Saint Germain and they expected to reign in glory after their ascension at an Ascended Master retreat that existed in the spirit world above Lake Titicaca" (Paolini and Paolini, 2000: 242). They tried to legitimize their role as ascended masters by claiming to be incarnations of various famous historical figures. For example, Mark's list of past embodiments included Noah, Lancelot, Marco Polo, and King Louis XIV of France (to name but a few). Elizabeth's assumed past embodiments included Queen Nefertiti, Catherine of Siena, Helen of Troy, and Marie Antoinette (Paolini and Paolini, 2000: 243).

The main belief of CUT is the notion that one can balance one's karma and make the ascension to the spiritual world to become an ascended master. In fact, when Mark Prophet died of a stroke in 1973, Elizabeth claimed he had balanced his karma, ascended, and become the ascended master Lanello (Whitsel, 2000: 37). Elizabeth, therefore, effectively routinized her late husband's charisma, and assumed the spiritual leadership role of Summit Lighthouse. She held this role until 1999 when she publicly announced she was stepping down due to early onset Alzheimer's (Whitsel, 2003: 150).

By the time Elizabeth Clare became the leader of Summit Lighthouse, it had grown into a considerable organization from the small group of followers that Mark Prophet had initially led. In 1980, Elizabeth Clare Prophet, along with her third husband, Randall King, started Church Universal and Triumphant, allegedly to divert funds from Summit Lighthouse, which brokers were suing (Paolini and Paolini, 2000: 250). For the purposes of this study, I refer to Prophet's group as CUT, regardless of the period.

Elizabeth Clare Prophet and Mark Prophet regularly published newsletters called *Pearls of Wisdom* where they wrote in the persona of particular ascended masters. *Pearls of Wisdom*, therefore, was an important factor in shaping group doctrines and behaviours. In addition to *Pearls of Wisdom*, Prophet and Prophet wrote several books in which they outlined their spiritual beliefs. In my study of CUT, I examine *Pearls of Wisdom*, other CUT published books, former member accounts, and academic portrayals of the group.

First, I examine the human body in CUT doctrine. In particular, I analyze how various broad Eastern spiritual traditions influence CUT's notion of the body. Furthermore, I consider how these notions of body play into dietary concerns within CUT. Next, I focus on the broad topic of diet within CUT. I further examine the subtopics of diet, such as: fasting, communion, prohibitions, and dietary environment. Throughout my discussion of CUT, I draw on several theorists to conceptualize the group's control of the body. Specifically, I borrow Turner's (1996) idea of the government of the body. In addition, I locate my theoretical discussion of CUT's dietary practices within an exploratory framework of social anorexia.

The Body in CUT

The concept of the body in CUT is rooted within the Eastern notion of *chakras*, which reputedly are energy systems located along the spine. Traditionally there are seven *chakras*, which correspond to different parts of the spinal column. The *chakras* are as follows: root, sacral, solar plexus, heart, throat, brow, and crown (McMurray, 2005: 94). The body in CUT is made up of seven parts— three upper and four lower. The three upper parts of the body relate to the three upper *chakras* and the

four lower parts relate to the four lower *chakras*. According to CUT, the human body is patterned after the "seven creative forces of Elohim" (Prophet and Prophet, 1986b: 224). The three upper bodies are the I AM presence, the Causal body, and the Holy Christ self, whereas the four lower bodies relate to the material universe (Prophet and Prophet, 1986b: 224).

The emphasis within CUT's teachings is on gaining control over the four lower matter bodies in order to evolve spiritually. CUT teaches that one's soul can ascend to the spiritual plane, but ascension and spiritual evolution are only possible if one can control one's *physical* body:

> Whereas the Christ Mind ought to dominate both mind and emotions, if the desire body is not disciplined and under control of the Holy Spirit through the Higher Self, it can cause shipwreck to the soul's evolution lifetime after lifetime. The physical body is the focus of integration for the evolving soul, which must gain freedom and self-mastery in the physical octave (Prophet and Prophet, 1986b: 225).

CUT's principle ideas about the body theologically justify a strict regimentation of it. According to group doctrine, in order for a disciple to advance spiritually, he or she must be able to control and renounce his or her physical body. I contend that Elizabeth Clare Prophet used group doctrine to control her followers' bodies and by extension, she controlled her followers completely. Following McGuire, (1990) we see that people experience events that happen to their bodies as happening to themselves. Therefore, when Clare Prophet used group doctrine to control devotees' physical bodies, she in effect controlled their minds too. Group members lived with

Prophet in a highly structured religious environment that stressed conformity. Because of the emphasis on following Prophet's religious teachings, members internalized her instructions about all aspects of their lives.

Elizabeth Clare Prophet often referred to the body as the body temple. In this manner, she situated the physical body within religious imagery. She also related mental and emotional demands to the care of the body temple. For example, she claimed that emotional disturbances, mental disorders, and physical difficulties were "manifestations of selfishness and an absence of true caring for the body temple over many centuries" (Prophet and Prophet, 1978: 172). Furthermore, Prophet claimed that the physical body could ascend only if the body temple were strong enough (Prophet and Prophet, 1972: 204-205; Prophet and Prophet, 1978: 76).

In his 1967 book, *Dossier on the Ascension*, Mark Prophet explained CUT's beliefs regarding the role of the body in facilitating the ascension of the soul. Specifically, he outlined the transformation of the physical body to weightlessness at the time of ascension. The physical body then ceases to exist as physical matter—rather it becomes weightless and floats into the atmosphere (Prophet, 1967: 158). Moreover, the physical body will transform into the glorified body. "[T]he individual ascends then, not in an earthly body but in a glorified spiritual body into which the physical form is changed on the instant by total immersion in the great God flame" (Prophet, 1967: 176).

CUT's doctrines surrounding the body stressed that the body was a temple that could ascend to the spiritual realm only if one followed certain practices and behaviours. Prophet continually told followers not to stress their body temples or

they risked spiritual harm. Furthermore, Prophet instructed followers that diet was an extremely important factor in reducing stress on the body temples, which in turn would affect spiritual ascension (Prophet and Prophet, 1978: 75).

Perhaps the most important claim that Prophet made in relation to the body was the assertion that Jesus Christ refuted the lie of bodily hunger:

> It is written that Jesus was a hungred [sic]. This signifies that the physical body of man, because human desire patterns are anchored therein, may express a great need to satisfy these human desires. His reply to the tempter who suggested he 'command that these stones be made bread' was 'It is written, Man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' By this statement of cosmic law the Master refuted the lie which was the basis of the first temptation (Prophet and Prophet, 1972: 96).

By claiming that hunger is merely a temptation that one can ignore on the spiritual path, CUT placed spiritual ascension above bodily needs and physical well-being. Furthermore, Prophet alleged that improper foods could block the *chakras* (Prophet and Prophet, 1978: 75), so it was important to follow the dietary advice of the ascended masters via herself as the messenger. Following Weber (1947: 361), Prophet reinforced her charismatic message with claims of otherworldly authority, and by doing so, made it more difficult for followers to question (Zablocki, 1980: 281).

Fasting

Over the centuries, religious devotees have used voluntary fasting both as a means to reject worldliness and as a means to practice asceticism (Fieldhouse, 1995: 120). Synnott (1993), for example, traced the evolution of asceticism to the second millennium of Christianity, and he argued that asceticism was institutionalized in part due to the founding of monastic orders. He contends that, during this period, a new emphasis on self-denial and pain characterized asceticism (Synnott, 1993: 17). Fasting was merely one method of denial and bodily pain. Synnott noted several reasons for ascetic practice, namely " . . . the expiation of sin, self-conquest, the intercession for divine graces and favours, and the imitation of Christ" (Synnott, 1993: 16).

Furthermore, as Bynum (1987) points out in her thorough discussion of fasting among medieval Christian women, to deny one's own bodily hunger was to feed Christ's body (Bynum, 1987: 33; Lupton, 1996: 131). Bynum, however, highlights the complex nature of fasting by maintaining that— both cross-culturally and intra-culturally— this form of self-denial involves many motivations and behaviors. For example, fasting could relate to fertility, exorcism, purification, mourning, or repentance (Bynum, 1987: 34-35).

Fasting was an important component of the dietary life of CUT followers, and as result, members followed several different fasts over the years. According to CUT doctrine, the primary reason for fasting was to cleanse the *chakras* and progress spiritually (Prophet, 1986b: 274)— although, as noted by Bynum, motivation for fasting is multifaceted. I posit that Clare Prophet's enforced fasts were an attempt to

govern her followers completely. Turner (1996), for example, argues the parents enforce or impose a form of government upon their children's bodies via dietary rules (Turner, 1996: 189-190). He refers to this as a "regime for the control of bodies" (Turner, 1996: 190). Drawing on a familial organizational framework, I liken Clare Prophet's followers to her children, and she used dietary restrictions as a parent would. In this case, she regimented her followers' diet in order to govern their bodies.

Elizabeth Clare Prophet claimed that one could improve one's third eye vision by fasting. The third eye, according to CUT doctrine, correlates with the soul *chakra* and therefore whatever the third eye sees is mirrored in the soul (Prophet and Prophet, 1986b: 284). Prophet recommended cleansing one's physical body in order to improve one's third eye vision:

> As a practical measure, third-eye vision can be improved through the cleansing of the blood, the colon and the physical body in general. Toxins accumulated in the blood and fatty tissue as well as in the colon are a direct hindrance to the vision. A balanced program of fasting on fresh vegetable or fruit juices, as well as distilled water and herb teas, is a good place to start (Prophet and Prophet, 1986b: 284).

Interestingly, Prophet's position on fasting shifted considerably from another discussion on fasting, where she maintained that the ascended masters only recommended three-day fasts that a master supervised and directed. At this juncture, Prophet warned that prolonged fasts "may result in the loss of one's spiritual faculties and even in demon possession, the very state the disciple seeks to overcome"

(Prophet and Prophet, 1986a: 441n).

Another motivating factor, however, that played a role in shaping CUT's views on fasting was budgetary considerations. Elizabeth Clare Prophet required followers at Summit University to fast one day per week as well as for three consecutive days once a month (Paolini and Paolini, 2000: 73). The result of the fasting rules was that for six or seven days per month, the food bill for the group was minimal. Consequently, CUT reduced its food budget by four to five thousand dollars per month. Prophet's ex-husband, Randall King, attested to the monetary motivation of fasting when he testified in court that the church had indeed made fasting mandatory in order to save money:

> Well, at Summit University, we had quite a large staff, and there was a lot of people and our monthly food budget got to be substantial some quarters [of the academic year]. And we decided if we made the fasting thing mandatory, that it was going to make a difference of 4- or $5,000 a month to our budget (CUT vs. Mull, 1986: 836).

At Summit University, therefore, CUT implemented its new policy regarding fasting.

One particular fast was a three day one that required followers to drink raw apple juice every couple of hours followed by olive oil at the conclusion of the fast (Paolini and Paolini, 2000: 35; Shmook, n.d.: 14: 19-20). The supposed purpose of the apple juice fast was to flush the gall bladder and release gallstones (Paolini and Paolini, 2000: 35). In addition to the gall bladder flush, students at Summit University often underwent high colonic enemas to rid their bodies of all waste (Paolini and Paolini, 2000: 35). High colonic irrigation, as practiced by CUT

members, may have been detrimental to their well-being, as the practice can lead to bowel injury and in rare instance rupture of the intestine (Gott, 1986).

Diet

Dietary rules and regulations have long been important facets of religious practice. Typically, religious food requirements function to demonstrate one's faith (Ayoub, 1996: 382; Fieldhouse, 1995: 120). For example, Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu dietary practices are a demonstration of codified behaviour as laid out in religious text and doctrine. Religious devotees who follow prescribed dietary regulations express their dedication and submission to the reputed word of God (Fieldhouse, 1995: 120).

Traditionally, self-discipline was integral to diet in a religious context, and as such one had to control one's self in order to protect one's soul. Therefore, religious diet was a regimentation of the body (Turner, 1996: 22). Turner (1996) contends that in the modern era, consumerism and the fashion industry have replaced religion as the dominant discourse that governs the body (Turner, 1996: 23). I do agree with Turner for the most part, but I also contend that religion is still the dominant discourse for members of high demand NRMs. Therefore, religious edict governs the bodies of NRM members, not the fashion industry or the high demands of consumerist culture. One can see this religious government of the body in the dietary practices of CUT. Specifically, I argue that Elizabeth Clare Prophet's dietary rules functioned to regiment followers' bodies. Over the course of her leadership years Clare Prophet developed an elaborate dietary schema, which members were encouraged to follow. Prophet tested many diets over the years; or rather, she made her followers test many

diets. In particular, Prophet used her church staff as guinea pigs who would try out certain diets before the rest of the church members (Shmook, n.d.: 14-20). Over the course of Elizabeth's leadership time in CUT, she instigated diets ranging from Ayurvedic to macrobiotic to vegetarian (Shmook, n.d.: 14-20; York, 1995: 71).

Clare Prophet developed a religious explanatory framework to justify her often bizarre dietary advice. Most importantly, she maintained that specific diets were necessary to progress spiritually. Indeed, following dietary laws was necessary to lengthen one's life and it constituted a commitment to God (Paolini and Paolini, 2000: 239; Prophet, 1992: 164). For instance, for a short time Prophet claimed that algae supplements contained the key to attaining Christ consciousness, and therefore followers should take them religiously (Pietrangelo, 1994: 104). Moreover, Prophet asserted that followers should eat only foods that had the correct balance of light energy in order to "maintain the light in every cell" (Prophet, 1992: 93).

Followers had to avoid certain foods as allegedly they had negative spiritual properties that could affect spiritual progress. For example, Prophet maintained that sugar was the tool of the dark force, and as such, members should avoid it. As well, devotees should avoid chocolate and alcohol, because they destroy brain cells (Paolini and Paolini, 2000: 238-239; York, 1995: 71). In addition to sugar, alcohol, and chocolate, Prophet also claimed that any kind of drug, including nicotine, would weaken the fibers of the spiritual body (Prophet and Prophet, 1978: 191). Prophet wrote, "We can destroy our bodies with sugar, alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, and other drugs, so that we no longer have a fitting temple for our souls to dwell in, let alone for the Father and Son to take up their abode in!" (Prophet, 1992: 165).

Another religious justification for dietary prohibition that Prophet maintained was that certain foods were from the astral plane and therefore followers should avoid them. The astral plane, according to CUT doctrine, is a plane of consciousness that harbors all negative emotions (Grey, 1981: 2:15). CUT determined that certain foods such as mushrooms are from the astral plane and therefore followers should not eat them, because God did not create matter from the astral plane (Grey, 1981: 2:15). Prophet developed complex explanations justifying the avoidance of pork and garlic. She claimed that eating pork was in fact a cannibalistic act, as it comprised the human genetic material of fallen ones or dark souls. Prophet also contended that one should avoid eating garlic, because its offensive smell scared away angels (Paolini and Paolini, 2000: 239).

Another example of Prophet's views shifting significantly over time is the issue of vegetarianism. In the 1970s, Prophet insisted that her followers adhere to a vegetarian diet. She stressed that an herbivorous diet was best for devotees and followers should avoid a carnivorous one (Prophet and Prophet, 1972: 53). As such, all meals at Summit University were strictly vegetarian (Grey, 1981; Paolini and Paolini, 2000: 35). York (1995) however, reports that during his ethnographic visit to CUT headquarters the dining hall served "fish, fowl, venison and organically raised beef" (York, 1995: 71).

Perhaps the most unusual diet that Clare Prophet prescribed was drinking urine. Apparently, Prophet recommended that her daughters drink their own urine during puberty, a practice she most likely adopted from Hindu sects (Shmook, n.d.: 14-20-21). Practitioners of Ayurvedic medicine often extol the virtues of urine

therapy. Ayurveda is based on the balance of five individual elements: aether, air, fire, water, and earth. Self-urine therapy or *shivambu shastra* is based on rebalancing one's elemental equilibrium (Perera, 2002). Drinking one's urine is most likely unpleasant, but it is generally not harmful.

A medical condition that is harmful, however, is severe nutritional depletion. Former CUT member Joseph Pietrangelo (1994) in his book, *Lambs to the Slaughter: My Fourteen Years with Elizabeth Clare Prophet and Church Universal and Triumphant,* maintains that many CUT members suffered from chronic nutritional depletion due to following Prophet's ever-changing dietary orders (Pietrangelo, 1994: 104).

While Prophet's followers were restricting their own diets in order to follow her dietary advice, Prophet herself was blatantly ignoring her own dietary rules. It is common for group leaders to follow a different set of rules than their followers, because most often they view themselves as more enlightened and therefore more worthy of the luxuries that they deny their flock. As Balch and Langdon (1998) state, ". . . structural conditions that free leaders from social control encourage corruption" (Balch and Langdon, 1998: 201). In the case of CUT, Prophet held a privileged role of messenger, and this role carried considerable status with it (Whitsel, 2000:93). Prophet ate a rich diet while her followers subsisted on bland, low calorie foods. Prophet ate extremely well—in fact, she had her own walk-in refrigerator stocked with expensive delicacies such as exotic fruit, ice cream, and seafood (Paolini and Paolini, 2000: 73).

Dietary Environment

In addition to controlling her followers' diet, Prophet also governed their dietary environment. For example, Prophet outlined where family members should sit while eating. She wrote: "Father and mother should sit opposite one another at the table anchoring the ray of Alpha and Omega, and the children on either side. Perfect God- control should be held by father and mother in the wholeness" (Prophet and Prophet, 1978: 71). I contend that Prophet tried to create a regime of governmentality for her followers (Foucault, 1997: 67). In this case, she attempted to parent both her followers and their children and regiment their lives via specific food related orders. Another way that Prophet controlled her followers' dietary environment was her insistence on stipulating eating related actions. Prophet outlined what hand to use for eating as well as a blessing that followers should recite as they ate:

> Therefore when you take whether of the food or of the concentrations of the food or of the elements that are prescribed, know that first you must hold them in your right hand, placing once again your left hand to your heart and calling forth the infinite blessing of Almighty God and the charging of that substance with concentrated light that is specific for you healing (Prophet and Prophet, 1978: 169-170).

It would be interesting to find out if CUT members actually did follow Prophet's explicit mealtime directions. Moreover, anorexics often have elaborate ritualized behaviours that accompany eating, such as breaking their food into little pieces or eating in a specified time (Johnston, 1993: 78). These behaviours give anorexics a sense of familiarity and routine over their eating habits. Likewise, Prophet was so

intent upon her quest for dominance that she even proscribed eating-related actions.

Additionally, Prophet even attempted to control the diet of follower's unborn children, by controlling the dietary environment of expectant mothers, and interestingly fathers. Prophet linked the karmic conditions of newborn children to the diet of their parents. She stressed that parents must follow the right diet in order to have children that have balanced yin and yang elements (Prophet, 1992: 203). Ironically, Prophet used dietary deprivation to control follower's children during the group's underground shelter days. While she was concerned for the diet of unborn children, members (no doubt following orders) denied food to born children as a method of discipline (Paolini and Paolini, 2000: 286).

Communion

Communion is an important rite in the Christian tradition, both Protestant and Catholic. Christians imitate Jesus' last meal with his disciples in Jerusalem. According to Christian scripture:

> While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom (Matt 26: 26-29 New Revised Standard Version).[14]

The Eucharist is merely a symbolic act in Protestant Christianity, whereas in the Catholic practice, the bread and wine is supposedly transubstantiated into the flesh

[14] See also: Mk 14:22-26; Lk 22: 14-23; 1Cor 11: 23-26.

and blood of Jesus Christ (Fieldhouse, 1995: 103; Oxtoby, 1996: 220). Christians conceptualize Christ's body as spiritual food to nurture the souls of believers (Lupton, 1996: 132).

Communion in CUT varied significantly from communion in traditional Christianity. Reminiscent of many practices and beliefs in CUT, Prophet expressed different interpretations and notions of communion over the course of several years. In her book, The *Lost Teachings of Jesus Vol. I* (originally published in 1986), Prophet adhered to a Protestant-like notion of communion. She expressed that communion was a symbolic act and that followers should focus on the spiritual body and blood of Christ and disregard the concept of transubstantiation (Prophet, 1986b: 117). Similarities with Protestant Christianity, however, end there. Prophet conceived of Jesus' flesh and blood as carriers of the light of Alpha and Omega—Alpha is the male principle, and Omega is the female principle. The bread and wine of Eucharist were charged with the light of Christos; therefore, followers partook in the light when they took communion (Prophet, 1986b: 117).

In contradiction to this view of communion, in an early (1982) lecture Prophet laid out an entirely different concept of it. In this particular seminar entitled "John the Beloved," Prophet responded to complaints from followers about the food that the group was serving them. She likened her meals to communion because she said her followers were eating her flesh and blood in the form of raw food. She also stressed that raw food was the "number one diet." Prophet admonished her followers that they should not complain about eating the meals because doing so was analogous to complaining at Jesus' last supper. As she stated:

> So, I realized yesterday that this is the initiation and that because I have made this spread of lovely food on Wednesday, the people who are refusing it or fussing about it are really having a problem with this doctrine of *eating my flesh and drinking my blood*, because it is my Alpha/Omega gift each Wednesday. *It is my communion* (Prophet, 1982. emphasis added).

In this instance, Prophet saw herself not only as a messenger, but also as a Christ-like figure that followers must venerate in the manner of Christ.

Conclusion

Whitsel (2003) discusses Prophet's authoritative leadership role and how she was able to influence her followers' views of reality. In effect, she created an in-group/ out- group dichotomy whereby the group saw itself threatened by outside forces (Whitsel, 2003: 51). Whitsel argues, "Her leadership function extended to *virtually every aspect of the group's existence*, including the way the outside world was perceived" (Whitsel, 2003: 56, emphasis added). Although Whitsel does not discuss or focus on the role of diet or the body in his study of CUT, I extend his analysis of Prophet's totalitarian leadership style to include these considerations.

Prophet constructed an all-encompassing ideology to which she expected her followers to adhere at all times, despite her own reluctance to do so herself. Through the use of novel and recycled concepts of the body, Prophet was able to keep her followers in a state of compliance at all times. In order for followers to progress spiritually, they had to follow Prophet's directions regarding diet and the body, because ultimately it was through the body *chakras* that spiritual energy flowed. In addition, in order for the spiritual body or soul to ascend the physical body (or body

temple as Prophet so often referred to it), it needed to be pure and balanced.

One could argue that Prophet only advocated fasts and restricted diets for the purposes of financial saving, as indicted by her former husband, Randall King. I argue, however, that Prophet's motivations were grander than mere financial considerations. For instance, one can appreciate her need for followers to worship her if one considers her communion as an imitation of Christ's. She desired her followers' complete obedience so fervently that she used dietary restrictions in an attempt to control them pervasively. Probably she justified her own exemptions from these restrictions by believing that she already was spiritually pure, since the ascended masters reputedly spoke to her.

Chapter Four: Breatharianism— Doctrinally Accepted Anorexia

Breatharianism is an example of a group that doctrinally imposes anorexia. A leader or intermediary does not oversee doctrinally imposed anorexia, but rather group doctrine or publications demand dietary restrictions. Although usually ideological leaders write group doctrines, doctrinal imposition differs from direct or mediated imposition. In doctrinally imposed anorexia, the essence of the group's doctrine is food restriction and diet, rather than just a subset or small part of its doctrines and/ or publications. Breatharianism, for example, imposes anorexia on followers doctrinally. Breatharians are perhaps the most striking example of group members who fast for spiritual reasons. In Breatharianism, the ideological founders propounded extremely high demands of a strict diet supposedly set out by spiritual gurus, and now others attempt to adhere to it even though these founders are not present to oversee them. To be a practicing Breatharian, it is not necessary to live in a communal group or to have contact with other Breatharians, since one can follow a Breatharian lifestyle on one's own.

In this chapter, I first outline the history of Breatharianism, and I introduce Wiley Brooks and Jasmuheen, who are the main founders and proponents of it. Second, I examine the main premise behind Breatharianism and how Breatharians justify this premise with Biblical imagery. Furthermore, I examine the transitional diet that Jasmuheen and Brooks recommend. As well, I look at the harm that this particular diet has caused to some followers. Moreover, I scrutinize the pseudo-scientific rational that Breatharianism uses to explain the process of living off air. In

addition, I apply Janja Lalich's (2004) bounded choice model to explicate how practicing Breatharians monitor themselves in the absence of a controlling leader.

Due to the absence of scholarly literature on Breatharianism, my sources for this chapter are primary group documents from the Internet, and one Breatharian book. In addition, I use media accounts of the group pulled from Internet archives or in a few cases actual hardcopy media reports.

History of Breatharianism

Wiley Brooks and Nancy Foss founded Breatharianism in the late 1970s. They published their co-authored book, *Breatharianism: Breathe and Live Forever,* in 1982. On the first page they refer to themselves as "Well Known Health Consultants." Today Wiley Brooks is still a practicing Breatharianism (more or less) and he oversees the Breatharian Institute of America in Colorado, which exists only in cyberspace in the form of the Breatharian website (www.breatharian.com). I found no current mention of Nancy Foss in relation to Breatharianism; therefore, I will assume that she is no longer an integral leader in the Breatharian movement.

At present, the leader of the main Breatharianism movement is Ellen Graves, who goes by the name Jasmuheen. Jasmuheen is the author of several books that espouse the Breatharian philosophy. Titles include: *Pranic Nourishment: Nutrition for the New Millennium* and *The Food of Gods.* In addition to writing books, Jasmuheen also oversees the Self Empowerment Academy and Cosmic Internet Academy (CIA) web pages, where she posts her teachings on Breatharianism and where one can order books, tapes, videos, and other Breatharian merchandise.

Jasmuheen believes that that she is "a messenger of the 'Ascended Masters,' with whom she communicates through cosmic telepathy" (Dutter, 1999: 21). She claims that she is able to live without eating by tapping into a different source of *pranic* nourishment, or liquid light (Dutter, 1999: 21). Indeed, Jasmuheen claims that she has existed without eating since 1993. At the very least, however, she does eat in rare circumstances that I will comment on later (Jasmuheen, 2005b: 1; Seenan, 1999).

Breatharianism is an audience cult whereby membership primarily involves consumer activities (Stark and Bainbridge, 1985: 26). Members consume cult doctrine through mass media, in particular via the Internet. Due to the non-communal nature of Breatharianism, members most likely do not interact with Jasmuheen on an interpersonal level. She claims to have around 5,000 followers, although this number is difficult to verify (Kibby, 1999: 21). It is unclear if Jasmuheen defines a follower as a practicing Breatharian or perhaps merely a consumer who has purchased Breatharian merchandise. Furthermore, it is unlikely that Jasmuheen would know whether followers are indeed practicing Breatharianism, as she does not interact with them personally.

Similarities between individual anorexia and a Breatharian lifestyle abound. For example, notions of food and eating guide and regiment the whole life of a Breatharian, which is parallel to the anorexic's manipulation of her life. Breatharianism teaches that he or she should concentrate on not eating and not feeling hunger, just like the anorexic who might think obsessively about not eating all day. This desire to fast and not feel hunger invades all aspects of one's life; it becomes all-encompassing. Breatharianism is a comprehensive ideology that, like anorexia,

controls its members. Followers learn to control themselves via the guise of group doctrine and by extension, the leader (Jasmuheen in the case of Breatharianism) indirectly gains control over her followers.

Premise of Breatharianism

The main premise of Breatharianism is that one can live without eating by gaining nutrients through *prana* or liquid light.[15] Jasmuheen characterizes *prana* as a form of energy that "pervades each cell of every living tissue and fluid in an organism like electricity through atoms in a battery" (Jasmuheen, 2005b: 1). According to Jasmuheen, *prana* has a biological counterpart called *apana* that is located in the brain and nervous system. *Apana* circulates in the nervous system and conducts mechanical and organic functions of the body (Jasmuheen, 2005b: 1). Breatharians are supposedly able to live off the air, because they are consciously breathing in *prana* and its counterpart *apana*, which together function to nourish the body:

> The term *prana* signifies both the cosmic life energy and its subtle biological conductor in the body and the two are inseparable. The extraction of *prana* to feed the brain is done by a limited group of nerves, operating in a certain bodily area. . . . Slow rhythmic breathing also absorbs more *prana* and allows it to be stored in the brain and nerve centers. *Prana* supplies electric force to the nerves, magnetizes the iron in the system and produces the aura as a natural emanation (Jasmuheen, 2005b: 1).

In order for one to be able to harness the energy of *prana,* one has to connect with one's personal God force.

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[15] Ancient Taoists may have practiced a form of fasting whereby they aspired to live off of air similar to Breathariansim. The *Zhonghuang jing* is an ancient Taoist document (most likely dating to the 4th century) that lays out the principles of extreme fasting (Eskildsen, 1998: 44).

The divine one within (DOW) is the god force or God, Allah, Brahma, etc. with whom the Breatharian must match vibration frequency in order to be able to use *prana* as a nutritional force (Jasmuheen, 2005d: 1). Jasmuheen does not articulate exactly how one matches one's vibration frequency with the DOW, nor does she explicate the concept of vibration frequency other than to say that it involves manipulating one's consciousness (Jasmuheen, 2005b: 2). Therefore, according to Jasmuheen, the definition of a Breatharian is one who sustains oneself through the life essence or *prana.* Jasmuheen explains that when people manipulate their consciousness to a higher vibration frequency, in turn they "change the molecular structure of their physical, emotional and mental bodies and free them from the necessity of taking substance from the atmospheric realm" (Jasmuheen, 2005b: 2).

Due to its ascetic basis, Breatharian philosophy continually stresses mastering the physical body with the mind. In fact, one can view the body within Breatharianism as rooted within Descartes' notion of dualism. A definitive break exists between body and mind, and if one can concentrate and strengthen one's mind then one can control the body. In her writings, Jasmuheen refers to "mind over matter" several times. For example, Jasmuheen claims that healthy people who eat are not healthy from eating; rather it is their mental expectation of health that creates health (Jasmuheen, 2005a: 1). Furthermore, Jasmuheen teaches that living off liquid light is in fact a mental exercise and ". . . a process of mind mastery where one learns to master molecular structure through 'mind over matter'" (Jasmuheen, 2005b:2).

Jasmuheen recommends that practicing Breatharians use their minds to command their bodies. In an article titled, "Pranic Nourishment to Breatharianism,"

she puts forth a program that Breatharians should repeat to reprogram their bodies. The program is in the form of a decree:

> I command the full attention and presences of my body consciousness NOW (visualize this elemental stepping forward like a foot soldier ready to take a specific command from the general/master- you). **I command that from this NOW moment you absorb all the vitamins, nutrients and nourishment—required to maintain peak physical health and vitality and self—regenerating vehicle- from the pranic forces. The fact that I may choose to continue to eat is purely for emotional body reasons and none of your business. So be it. So be it** (Jasmuheen, 2005c: 1, emphasis in original).

Consequently, the basic premise of Breatharianism is that people can use their minds to overcome the physical needs of their bodies. After one masters the mind over matter component of Breatharianism, one will be able to merge with the DOW and live off pranic nourishment.

Having established the basic claims of Breatharianism, I now return to a discussion of Lalich's (2004) bounded choice theory. I will employ it, alongside anorexia control theory, to help explain how Breatharians regulate themselves, despite the lack of a present leader.

Bounded Choice

I discuss Lalich's (2004) bounded choice model in detail in chapter one. Here I extract from the model two main points. First, one of the structural dimensions of bounded choice is the concept that the group has a transcendent belief system that consists of a promise and a path (Lalich, 2004: 226). In the case of Breatharianism,

the promise is enlightenment and the ability to gain nourishment from alternative energy sources. The path is the divine nutrition program and the transitional diet where followers connect with their God force.

Second, Lalich lists systems of influence and control another structural dimension in her model (Lalich, 2004: 222-223). The dimension of influence and control is the most relevant to my discussion of Breatharianism as a controlling philosophy. Specifically, Lalich argues that there are three crucial characteristics of social influence: ". . . self-monitoring, peer monitoring, and modeling oneself after approved behaviour, exemplified by the leader, the ideal of the belief system, and other members" (Lalich, 2004: 230). Although Breatharian followers most likely do not interact with other followers, they are socially influenced by Jasmuheen's 'approved behaviour.' Jasmuheen discusses her *pranic* eating behaviour through her website and through her merchandise such as books, audiotapes, and videos. As well, she has articulated her position in mainstream media sources such as the *US News and World Report* (Lagasse, 2002: 72).

In addition to social controls, Lalich also discusses internal and external mechanisms of control. She refers specifically to Heaven's Gate and the Democratic Workers Party, which were both total institutions:

> But the harshest sanction of all was internal— the devoted member's inner capacity to control urges, desires, actions, thoughts, and beliefs that were contrary to the group's teaching. Self-condemnation was everyday fare. These internalized sanctions were among the most powerful mechanisms of control. Ultimately, the individual cult member's ability to enact freedom of

> action was not restricted by lurking external forces or even by the confines of the system. Rather, at this point of the fusion of personal freedom and self-renunciation, at this point of personal closure, *the individual may well become his own source of constraint* (Lalich, 2004: 254 emphasis added).

I extend Lalich's internal mechanism of control to apply to Breatharianism, even though Breatharianism is an audience cult and not a total institution. Within Breatharianism, the individual becomes his or her own harshest critic, despite the lack of ". . . lurking external forces" (Lalich, 2004: 254).

Bodily Control

Jasmuheen stresses that if one controls one's body then one is actually experiencing freedom, because one is free from the need to eat and free to choose the option of living off of *pranic* nourishment. She refers to Breatharians as "empowered beings who control their vehicle rather than the vehicle controls them" (Jasmuheen, 2005c: 1). Interestingly, the language that Jasmuheen uses to describe a Breatharian is similar to the language that anorexic control theorists use to describe anorexics, although most often psychologists and theorists view anorexics as un-empowered not empowered. One of the social-psychological explanations for anorexics is based on the assumption that its cause is a desire to have complete control over one's body (See Bruch, 1978; Brumberg, 1988; Lelwica, 1999; Miles, 1995; Orbach, 1986). Ironically, Jasmuheen uses anorexia as a metaphor in her teachings. For example, she refers to humanities' reliance on eating as "emotional, mental, and spiritual anorexia" (Jasmuheen, 2005e: 3).

I equate Brooks and Foss's (1982) emphasis on controlling the body to the control that an anorexic holds over her own body. Throughout their book, Brooks and Foss stress the need for one to control one's body entirely. They emphasize perfecting one's body by controlling it. Interestingly, anorexics are often perfectionists who attempt precision in everything that they do, including weight loss (Orbach, 1986:100). Brooks and Foss write:

> Everyone has his or her own ideas as to what a perfect body should look like. To us 'perfection' means that we are allowed to *be in control of ourselves* . . . . Once the diet is perfected for each individual's body, all physical matter is the manifestation of a mental cause. We then have *control of the body instead of the body controlling us* (Brooks and Foss, 1982: 31, emphasis added).

There are striking similarities between Breatharian doctrine and the control theory of anorexia. Most significant is the emphasis that both beliefs place upon striving for perfection in life via bodily control.

Biblical Basis

Breatharianism evokes religious and spiritual imagery on many levels. First, the notion of people merging with the DOW and sustaining themselves by the light of creation is rooted within New Age principals of religiosity. Breatharianism, however, also draws from the Christian tradition, since Brooks and Foss (1982) use biblical passages to support Breatharianism. The basis of Breatharian doctrine is the notion that humanity has progressed through five stages. These stages are carnivorous, vegetarian, fruitarian, liquidarian, and breatharian (Brooks and Foss, 1982: 9). According to Breatharian doctrine, God divinely commanded vegetarianism and

fruitarianism in Genesis 1:26. God said to love all creatures (and therefore people) should have ended the first stage of 'carnivorous' eating and entered into the next two stages of vegetarianism and fruitarianism (Brooks and Foss, 1982: 9).

Breatharians believe that God prescribed living on air in the book of Genesis 2:7: "God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living entity" (Brooks and Foss, 1982: 50). Therefore, according to Breatharianism, people are capable of living solely on air as God intended. Further evidence of this alleged capability is the long life spans of people during biblical times,[16] whom Brooks and Foss asserted adhered to the Breatharian philosophy (Brooks and Foss, 1982: 20).

Jasmuheen also draws on Christian imagery to reinforce her philosophy. She reasons that the practice of Breatharianism will bring about the biblical prophecy of peace among the kingdoms as laid out in Isaiah 11: 6-9.[17] She argues that aggression in the animal kingdom is a mirror of human aggression. If Breatharians boost divine radiation, then divine love will be reflected in the animal kingdom and we will see the "lion laying down with the lamb" (Jasmuheen, 2005e: 1).

Pseudo-Science Rationale

In addition to biblical justification, Breatharians have developed a very elaborate pseudo-scientific rationale for living off air. Brooks and Foss (1982) claim that because our bodies are composed of the same elements found in air— hydrogen, oxygen, carbon dioxide and water— we should be able to live on air alone because

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[16] For example, in Genesis Adam allegedly lived for 930 years and his son Seth for 912 years (Gen. 5: 3-6).

[17] "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11: 6-9).

our bodies can get all the building blocks of life from it (Brooks and Foss, 1982: 27). Breatharianism questions the basis of how the body breaks down food energy to regenerate cells and sustain life. Breatharian doctrine states that if one does not eat, then the body actually saves energy, because the body does not expend energy to digest and break down food (Brooks and Foss, 1982: 25). In fact, Jasmuheen claims that this energy normally used to digest food is re-directed elsewhere and therefore the Breatharian has increased energy levels (Jasmuheen, 2005b: 2).

Although Breatharians claim that food is not necessary for building cells and sustaining life, they do not offer any real scientific explanation to explain how breathing air can build cells. Breatharianism does offer, however, a logic based on not eating: "Electrons do not eat, atoms do not eat, molecules do not eat, cells do not eat, and the body is built of and sustained by the cells, and not by what man eats" (Brooks, 2004).

Brooks has differing teachings from Jasmuheen regarding the role of the digestive system. Brooks contends that Breatharians use the digestive system for the condensation of spiritual energy into physical energy and matter on which the body lives (Brooks, 2004). Jasmuheen conversely claims that humans have digestive systems because people are conditioned to eating physical food, but with time, the human body will evolve to become a system that does not need to digest physical food. Jasmuheen uses pseudo-scientific language to explain this process. She writes, ". . . for we are the masters of our own body [sic] and as such every cell of our body is constantly listening to our thoughts, words and actions to which the molecules and atoms then adjust themselves in response" (Jasmuheen, 2005e: 1).

Wiley Brooks (2004) uses a simplistic argument to rationalize that the body can live on air alone. He reasons, "science has proven that the average person can live 30 days or more on just air and water alone. But only a few minutes without air" (Brooks, 2004: 1). Brooks attempts to lend credence to Breatharianism by evoking scientific knowledge, despite the obvious illogical basis of his argument.

Transition Diet

Jasmuheen recommends a twenty-one day initial fast before embarking on a Breatharian lifestyle so that the body supposedly can adapt to living off alternative energy sources. Brooks and Foss (1982) originally laid out the twenty-one day transitional diet, which varies significantly from Jasmuheen's later transition diet. The teachings of the Eastern tradition of yoga inspired Brooks and Foss's transitional diet. In fact, they state, "the basis of the diet comes from the Yogic theory that energy is all things and God is life (or energy)" (Brooks and Foss, 1982: 108). The transition diet centers on the idea that the body absorbs energy through the *chakras*; therefore, the purpose of the diet is to detoxify the body and ready it to utilize the *chakras* to their full potential.

The diet consists of two stages, starting with eating only yellow foods, because according to Breatharian philosophy yellow foods emit the correct vibrations that cleanse and detoxify (Brooks and Foss, 1982: 108). Brooks and Foss list several yellow foods that are suitable for the first stage of the transitional diet; including: chamomile tea, lemons, chicken, mustard, ice cream, maple syrup and bread (among others). Brooks and Foss warn that the yellow transitional diet is not related to nutrition whatsoever (Brooks and Foss, 1982: 108).

Aspiring Breatharians follow the yellow transitional diet for as long as their bodies tell them to. After an undetermined amount of time, they switch to the second stage of the de-toxification, which is the fruit diet. Then after another undetermined period, followers slowly cease eating almost entirely.

Jasmuheen's transitional diet is much more intense than Brooks and Foss's. I argue that Jasmuheen's transitional diet is an example of a social control as described in Lalich's bounded choice model. Specifically, the transitional diet is an illustration of approved behaviour modeling, whereby Jasmuheen describes her own experiences and success with the diet, in an attempt to produce conformity in her followers.

Jasmuheen's transitional diet is a twenty-one day fast, which is quite controversial because it advocates no food or drink for the first seven days and then only small sips of water for the remaining fourteen days (Dutter, 1999). Jasmuheen does warn followers that the twenty- one day fast is a serious undertaking. She writes:

> *The 21 day process is a sacred initiation. It is not something to be entered into lightly as going without food and water is a very extreme thing to do and for those untrained it can be hazardous and even dangerous. If an untuned person was* [sic] *to stop eating they* [sic] *could very possibly die. We urge readers of this site and our literature to be responsible, to do adequate research and preparation before electing to convert the body in this manner* (Jasmuheen, 2005d: 3, emphasis in original).

Furthermore, Jasmuheen cautions that people should undertake the twenty-one day fast only if they are spiritually ready. She warns that the fast is not suitable for people

with emotional and health problems, nor for people who are emotionally attached to food and eating (Jasmuheen, 2005d: 3).

In recent years, Jasmuheen's twenty-one day fast has drawn media attention because at least three followers have died while attempting her transition diet. One woman, Verity Linn, passed away in September 1999, and found with Ms. Linn's body was a diary containing references to Jasmuheen (*Newswire,* 2000).

The fact that the human body cannot survive without food or water does not seem to bother Jasmuheen. All scientific knowledge points out that the body needs food. Without food, the body begins to eat itself in order to gain nutrients. This self-consumption leads to tissue damage and eventually death due to kidney or heart failure. Without liquid, however, death would occur in a matter of days due to dehydration (Kibby, 1999). When confronted with the deaths of those attempting her fast, Jasmuheen refused any responsibility for their fate. She said, "[i]f people are not coming from a place of integrity and the right motivation, then [the transition fast] doesn't work" (Dutter, 1999).

Frank (1991) articulated the concept of the 'disciplined body' whereby one who can no longer discipline one's own body turns to dominating others' bodies, "When internal discipline can no longer neutralize the threat of its own contingency, the disciplined body may turn to domination, enforcing on the bodies of others the control it cannot exercise over itself" (Frank, 1991: 55). In terms of Lalich's bounded choice theory, the disciplined body manifests itself through approved behaviour modeling within a charismatic authoritarian relationship. I argue that Jasmuheen, in promoting her transitional diet, is attempting to dominate the bodies of her followers.

Levels of Breatharianism

Jasmuheen outlines two different classificatory schemas concerning the levels of Breatharianism. The first level is one who lives solely on pure *prana.* The technical definition for Breatharians, one who "never eats food nor drinks fluid. Their nourishment comes purely from prana, the universal life force" (Jasmuheen, 2005c: 1). The second level is a Breatharian who might eat a little bit for the purposes of social interaction. Lastly, the third level is a Breatharian who might eat for the sensory pleasure of tasting rich foods (Jasmuheen, 2005c: 1). Jasmuheen admits that she indulges now and again on cheesecake for the sole pleasure of the taste (Jasmuheen, 2005a: 1). Regardless if one is nourished on pure *prana* or is a social or pleasure nibbler, Jasmuheen stresses that Breatharians who may eat a little here and there do not need this food for survival, because they are living off *prana* (Jasmuheen, 2005c: 1).

The other classification system of Breatharianism comes from Jasmuheen's website, the Self Empowerment Academy. Jasmuheen refers to this schema as the Divine Nutrition Program (DNP). The DNP consists of three levels with a definition of each level as well as recommended readings. For example, level one is ". . . simply the gift of life. A level 1 human bio-system is a hungry one. It is susceptible to physical, emotional, mental and spiritual dis-ease [sic] and its health, happiness, peace and prosperity levels fluctuate without control" (Jasmuheen, 2005f: 1). A level two in the DNP is disease free and is capable of finding peace, health, and happiness because of his or her lifestyle choices (Jasmuheen, 2005f: 1).

Level three in the DNP is the most interesting, and in level three one is able to live off air and become a Breatharian. Jasmuheen explains:

> A level 3 bio-system is an individual who is free from the need of many of earth's resources, who can— if they [sic] wish to— sustain themselves without the need of physical food and whose system remains healthy and disease free. Some 'level 3's' are also free from the need to sleep and from the death and aging process (Jasmuheen, 2005f: 1).

Scientifically, it is highly unlikely that one can be free from the need to eat and the need to sleep, as Jasmuheen claims is possible in level three of the DNP. Perhaps she anticipated such skepticism, because directly under her description of level three there is a quote from philosopher Arthur Shopenhauer, " 'All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as bring self-evident'" (Shopenhauer in Jasmuheen, 2005f: 1).

Yoga

Jasmuheen encourages aspiring and active Breatharians to practice yoga in order to feed from the divine nutrition channel (Jasmuheen, 2005e: 3). The apparent logic behind Jasmuheen's emphasis on yoga is that the body gains nutrients from light through the *chakras*;[18] therefore, in order to open the *chakras* one must engage in yoga. Jasmuheen differentiates between several forms of yoga; the most important of these for Breatharian philosophy are *surya*, *raja*, *hatha*, and *kria*-yoga. Jasmuheen's suggestion that her followers practice yoga is an example of approved behaviour modeling which is a crucial component of social influence. According to Lalich (2004), social influence is a structural dimension of control; therefore, by

[18] For a discussion of *chakras* see chapter 3 page 39 on the Church Universal and Triumphant.

stressing that her followers practice yoga, Jasmuheen is using social influence to promote adherence to her belief system (Lalich, 2004: 230).

According to Jasmuheen, *surya*-yoga is the yoga of the sun, and therefore Breatharians must practice it in order to connect with the sun as the ultimate source of nourishment in addition to connecting with the DOW (Jasmuheen, 2005e: 4). *Raja*-yoga is necessary for concentration and self-control, and *hatha*-yoga (i.e. meditation through body postures) is necessary to prepare the physical body to be strong enough to "handle the download of the Divine Electricity flow that comes with pranic feeding. . ." (Jasmuheen, 2005e: 5).

Kria-yoga is the most important form of yoga for Breatharians. Apparently, the majority of previous pranic-feeders used *kria*-yoga to tap into divine nutrition. For example, Jasmuheen claims that a mystic named Giri Bala practiced *kria*-yoga and therefore did not need to eat or drink for six decades. In addition, Jasmuheen cites another mystic Himalayan, Babaji, who used *kria*-yoga to achieve immortality (Jasmuheen, 2005e: 5). *Kria*-yoga involves meditating on different light frequencies in order to absorb light through the *chakras* (Jasmuheen, 2005e: 5). *Kria*-yoga entails three practices: perfection of the body and the senses, contact with a deity, and a meditative state (Carpenter, 2003: 27-28). *Kria*-yoga, according to Jasmuheen, is vital to maintain energy levels, particularly when there are high amounts of air pollution. If the air is too polluted then one cannot gain enough pure air and sun energy through *surya*-yoga.

Pollution

It is interesting to note that both Wiley Brooks and Jasmuheen have used the same excuse when followers or the media have caught them eating. When followers caught Wiley Brooks eating in the 1970s he claimed that he was not able to gain nutrients from the air due to air pollution (Lagasse, 2002: 72). Jasmuheen used an identical excuse when she had to back out of a surveillance challenge issued by Australia's 60 Minutes TV show. Jasmuheen claimed that she needed to eat because a roadway nearby was polluting the air and therefore she could not garner the nutrients she needed through her breath (Lagasse, 2002: 72). Eating to overcome the effects of polluted air is inconsistent with her teachings, since she emphasizes that one can use different forms of yoga to overcome pollution (Jasmuheen, 2005e: 6).

Future Vision

Jasmuheen's future visions for Breatharianism are quite lofty to say the least. In fact, she posits Breatharianism as the answer to world hunger.[4] She sets out three phases in the solution to world hunger. The first phase is for a select few to practice Breatharianism. Jasmuheen discusses a group of practicing Breatharians that she refers to as the Knights of Camelot who consider themselves guinea pigs in trying out the divine nutrition program (Jasmuheen, 2005d: 1). The second phase is for the Breatharians to talk about living on *pranic* nourishment and to gather like-minded individuals together. Moreover, the final phase is a massive re-education program, where Breatharians explain and expel the merits of their philosophy to governments, media, world health organizations and anyone else who will listen and benefit

(Jasmuheen, 2005d: 2). Apparently, we are currently in the third phase of the solution to world hunger.

Jasmuheen's vision of the future is one where every person lives off *pranic* nourishment and therefore slaughter of animals will cease to happen. Furthermore, she claims to have glimpsed what this new world order will look like. She expresses:

> In this 'new' world, there is love, honor and respect for all life and people have been educated as to how to create and maintain physical, emotional, mental and spiritual fitness. In this world, we exist in rainbow cities of crystalline light that radiate with love and wisdom and health and happiness (Jasmuheen, 2005e: 7).

Relating back to the bounded choice model, Jamsuheen's future vision is an example of a transcendent belief system (Lalich, 2004: 226). Jasmuheen claims that Breatharianism is the 'true path,' and she has even glimpsed the future. Moreover, Breatharianism is all- inclusive as it claims to have the all the answers—physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual.

Furthermore, Breatharianism stresses the need for domination of our bodies in order to free ourselves from the restraints of humanity (Brooks and Foss, 1982: 18). Specifically, Jasmuheen discusses these restraints as part of a larger societal malaise. In fact, she classifies several problems as the anorexia of humanity. In particular, she argues that, ". . . malnutrition, obesity and physical anorexia are all the result of humanity's various emotional, mental and spiritual states of anorexia which Divine Nutrition, when released from within, has the power to eliminate" (Jasmuheen, 2005e: 6). Moreover, she characterizes eating and gaining pleasure from food as

emotional addiction (Jasmuheen, 2005e: 7). In effect, Jasmuheen problematizes eating, which creates similar attitudes in her followers who attempt to emulate her behaviour.

Conclusion

The basis of the control theory of anorexia is that the anorexic denies herself food in an attempt to control her body and in turn control her life (Orbach, 1986: 14). The anorexia control theory is an individualized model of food restriction, but I use the control analogy as a starting point in which to develop a social model of dietary restraint. As Susie Orbach (1986) explains about the behaviour of the individual anorexic, "The control over food and the particularly complicated way she relates to it is linked with a need to have something uniquely her own, something under her control, something she fashions" (Orbach, 1986: 113). I extend Orbach's comments to a social model by arguing that it is Jasmuheen's followers' bodies that she feels the need to control. In particular, I contend that Jasmuheen's Breatharianism is an indirect attempt to control her follower's bodies—followers that she most likely has not met, nor will she ever meet. In turn, by controlling her followers' bodies Jasmuheen is in effect controlling them entirely.

Due to the non-communal nature of the group, I draw upon Lalich's bounded choice model to explain social control. In terms of individualized anorexia, control is self-imposed. Anorexics wield control over themselves via their power over their bodies and their functions. Conversely, in the situation of imposed anorexia, the doctrines or the dictates of the leader force anorexic-like diets onto members. Therefore, in this instance food deprivation is not self-control, but rather what Lalich

refers to as "internal mechanisms of control" (Lalich, 2004: 254). Such is the case in Breatharianism where followers adhere to group doctrine and discipline their own bodies in the absence of external mechanisms of control, such as group leaders or other followers. The control theory of anorexia rests upon the notion of self-control where the anorexic strives to control her body in order to feel in control of her whole life. In imposed anorexia, however, self-control becomes socially imposed control.

Chapter Five: The Family of Anne Hamilton- Byrne— Mediated Anorexia

Introduction

Mediated anorexia is a situation in which a subordinate, acting on behalf of the leader, restricts members' food intake. In this chapter, I explicit the concept of mediated anorexia by examining The Family of Anne Hamilton-Byrne. Anne is an ideological group leader who by-and-large used intermediaries to enforce food restrictions on group children, given that she spent extended periods away from her immediate followers. Anne Hamilton-Byrne was the leader of a group in Australia called The Family or the Great White Brotherhood (hereafter referred to as The Family). She adopted several children and attempted to groom them as future 'inheritors of the earth' who would continue with her prophetic visions after the world was consumed by a holocaust (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 1). Anne was almost entirely physically absent from raising her adopted children. She, however, directed adult members of the group (aunties) to care for them. Anne spent about half of the year in Australia and even then only saw 'her' children on weekends. Essentially the aunties were surrogate mothers to the children, because "[t]he aunties taught us, fed us, supervised our lives and enforced Anne's rules and the punishments she outlined" (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 14).

To date no academic studies exist about The Family. In fact, written accounts of the Family[19] are limited to media reports and one book written by Anne's adopted daughter Sarah Hamilton-Byrne.[20] Consequently, my investigation and consideration

[19] The exception is my own brief look at the group (Meikle, 2005).
[20] Sarah Hamilton Byrne is a medical doctor who was charged recently with writing fraudulent prescriptions for painkillers (Berrie, 2005: 2). Sarah pled guilty to all charges and contended that she

of The Family is cursory at best. I acknowledge the one-sidedness of my sources, and furthermore I acknowledge the absence of group literature or publications. The scarcity of literature on The Family, however, is precisely the reason why this chapter is important, since scholarly investigations must start somewhere.

In this chapter, I first consider the basis of The Family's belief system. Specifically, I locate Anne's charismatic position within group religious values. Next, I consider the structure of the group; in particular, I focus on the role that the aunties played in the group hierarchy and their role in raising Anne's adopted children. Subsequently, I focus on the daily structure of the children's lives. Specifically, I look at food deprivation as a mechanism of control in the lives of the children. I argue that Anne imposed anorexia on her adopted children through mediators, in this instance group members referred to as aunties. For the most part, Anne did not directly impose anorexia, but rather directed others to implement her restrictive orders. Anne used dietary restriction to control her children and by extension then felt a sense of control over them.

Beliefs

Anne Hamilton-Byrne co-founded The Family with a physician named Raynor Johnson in the 1960s. Anne, however, had a more central role in the group, since her followers considered her as the reincarnation of Jesus Christ, whereas Dr. Johnson was more like John the Baptist. (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 39). Initially, the group focused on practicing yoga and meditating (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 102).

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needed the painkillers to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder induced by her abhorrent childhood in The Family. The magistrate in the case pardoned her on all accounts because of her unusual and difficult childhood. He stated, "It [her childhood] has had an indelible effect on her and, despite that, she has risen. . . . almost like a phoenix to great heights" (Berrie, 2005: 2).

Doctrines claimed that group members initiated into The Family can attain *nirvana* in this lifetime, if they work closely with their master.

The Family's doctrine borrows from several world religions as well as the New Age movement in general. For example, the concept of *nirvana* is central to both Buddhism and the Jain tradition where it refers to "the state of absolute bliss associated with final enlightenment" (Amore and Ching, 1996: 341). Sarah Hamilton-Byrne characterized the group's beliefs as a mixture of the Eastern religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, and Zen— mixed with Christian concepts (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 115).

The Family's belief system was millennial in nature, sharing out basic characteristics of millenarian movements that Norman Cohn (1970) outlined. First, millenarian movements are collective in the sense that only members within the initiated group will achieve salvation (Cohn, 1970: 13). Second, the group pictures salvation as terrestrial, ". . . in the sense that it is to be realized on this earth and not in some other-worldly heaven" (Cohn, 1970: 13). Next, salvation is imminent specifically; salvation will occur rapidly and at in the near future (Cohn, 1970: 13). Next, salvation in millenarian movements is total. Life on earth at it exists at present will cease to be and a new order will be established (Cohn, 1970: 13). Finally, salvation will be miraculous— it will occur by way of some supernatural or otherworldly force (Cohn, 1970: 13).

All of Cohn's characteristics of millenarian deliverance apply to The Family, whose members believed in a collective terrestrial salvation. The group's doctrines stressed that the end of the world was imminent and only those who lived in the

Dandenong region (where the group was located) would survive (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 116). Furthermore, after the holocaust, Anne's adopted children would inherit the earth, so Anne was grooming them to become the future leaders of the world (Hamilton-Byrne, 1996: 202).

The Family considered Anne Hamilton-Byrne to be their guru, and as such she lived a somewhat separate life from that of her followers. Anne was a charismatic leader in the Weberian sense. Her followers endowed her with a sense of divine authority over themselves and their lives. Von Stientengron (2001), following Weber, summarizes charisma as:

> [A] power operating in time. It is not the rule, but the exception: a spark of divine presence flashing into ordinary life and legitimizing leadership and change. It is divine agency operating through man, a power temporarily conferred on him which creates extraordinary authority: a gift or fruit of the Holy Spirit or other divinities, it is clearly of superhuman origin and superhuman effect (Von Stientengron, 2001: 15)

Anne Hamilton-Byrne was without a doubt a charismatic leader to her followers and as such, she lived a more privileged life than did her followers. Among her privileges was that she spent the majority of the year living in England or the United States. Because of her extended absences from her adopted children in Australia, Anne appointed group members to raise and look after her children.

Aunties

Anne had group members act as caregivers or aunties to look after her children two weeks on and two weeks off. Neither The Family nor Anne financially

compensated the aunties for their time or work, and they were not supposed to disclose to anyone where they went for two weeks out of every month (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 14). The aunties' motive to be caregivers was that it was a form of service to their master— Anne.

The Family was a religious group founded on the guru-follower or guru-*chela* relationship, which rests on the premise of total self-surrender on the part of the follower. The follower (or *chela*) must surrender intellect, will, emotion, and body to his or her guru. Furthermore, the *chela* must eradicate all doubts about the guru and love and obey him or her unconditionally (Mangalwadi, 1977: 225).

Mangalwadi (1977) indicates key characteristics of modern guruism that aide in understanding the relational dynamics of guru religious movements (such as The Family). First, the guru preaches a distinct message about God. Second, this message is based on the guru's own philosophical system that builds upon some form of (usually mystical) experience. Next, the guru acquires a "fellowship of believers," and last, the guru develops a charismatic lifestyle that echoes the codes from his or her religious system (Mangalwadi, 1977: 47). Often part of the guru-*chela* system includes the *chelas* performing acts of service for their guru as part of their spiritual apprenticeship (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: Page). In the case of The Family, the children's caregivers were merely following the orders of their guru, Anne, whom they had to uncritically obey.

The aunties controlled all aspects of the children's lives, including their diet, sleep patterns, schooling, playtime, exercise, personal hygiene, etc. (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 14). Anne, however, actually made the rules and requested that the aunties

cared them out. When Anne was absent, she left books that the group referred to as "Mummy's rule books" (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 39). The aunties used the rulebooks to enforce Anne's specified code of conduct for her adopted children (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 39).

Although the aunties were the children's caregivers, in actuality they were more like disciplinarians who were supposed to provide the children with their basic needs. Below I discuss specific discipline and punishment that the aunties meted out. First, however, I stress two crucial details about the aunties. Primarily, they did not live the austere lives that their charges did. For example, the children referred to the food that the aunties ate as 'aunty food,' which included ". . . bread and other 'delicacies' that we [the children] did not have" (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 42). Second, the aunties were essentially only following Anne's orders. In this regard, they were disciplinarians whom the children often feared and hated, but they were only carrying out the rules— not making them. As Sarah Hamilton-Byrne asserts:

> Often we didn't comprehend that Anne was behind our treatment so we blamed the Aunties instead. I think that, too, was part of the design. If we had been capable of analyzing our situation more fully we probably would have realized Anne's dominant role in all this, but it was far easier to use the aunties as a scapegoat instead of ruining our fantasy of a loving and kind mother (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 113).

A more detailed analysis of the aunties' actions follows below. I set the stage for that analysis by first considering the daily life of Anne Hamilton-Byrne's adopted children.

Structure of Children's Daily Lives

In her book, Anne Hamilton-Byrne's adopted daughter, Sarah Hamilton-Byrne, recounts her childhood growing up in a very controlled environment. Sarah lived with other children from the group, who all believed that they were Anne's flesh and blood children. They lived in a highly regulated and monitored home, especially concerning food issues. I first examine the diet of the children. Next, I consider the inventive ways that the children attempted to solve their food scarcity problems. Subsequently, I examine the case of one of the children named Cassandra who Anne severely nutritionally deprived. Finally, I consider how Anne's concept of her own body affected the diet and bodies of her adopted children. Specifically, I look at Anne's practice of enforced weighing of the children.

Diet

The diet of Anne's adopted children was extremely low in nutrients, especially considering the amount of nutrient rich foods that a growing child needs. Sarah describes in detail her typical daily fare growing up. Breakfast usually consisted of three pieces of fruit for the girls, and four for the boys. Often the fruit was rotten as the aunties tried to minimize costs by buying seconds of fruit from a local orchard (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 27). Lunch was usually boiled or steamed veggies. If, however, several children had missed meals due to punishments, then excess food was re-boiled until eaten (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 31). Dinner (called tea in Australia) was usually a salad or ". . . scrambled eggs once in a blue moon, rice

occasionally, or jelly or fruit salad in summer. This was followed by two or three biscuits, a handful of nuts and sultanas occasionally, and one or two pieces of fruit" (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 32).

Although I do not know the exact quantities of the food, I estimate (using caloriecounter.com) that the children were consuming significantly less than 1500 calories per day. A typical growing child *needs* between 1400 and 2000 calories per day depending on age, size, and gender (www.americanheart.org). Therefore, even without missing meals the children were already not meeting basic healthy caloric intake goals. Furthermore, the diet that the children subsisted on was almost lacking in protein entirely, since they consumed no dairy or meat products. In addition, Sarah makes no mention of non-meat protein such as tofu or beans in the children's diet.

Turner (1996) articulates that feeding children is a form of regimentation of children's lives (Turner, 1996: 176). In the case of The Family, where Anne adopted the children (although they were told that they were Anne's biological children), a strictly regimented diet served to impose not only a form of government over the children, but also a false sense of family. Ultimately, parents are responsible for ensuring their children are fed and nourished, but in this case the aunties— who were not aunties at all in the biological nor adoptive sense of the word— regulated the diet of the children for their mother. Interestingly, Anne was not their biological mother, nor was she really present and active in their lives as a "normal" mother might be. Therefore, I contend that The Family was in many ways a fictive family, and one that imposed a strict and abusive dietary regimentation.

Turner contends, "[w]hile feeding a child is an act of care and support, creating a bond between parents, and child, it is also the imposition of a 'mode of living' (a regimen) on a subordinate" (Turner, 1996: 176). It seems, however, that the caring and bonding function of feeding was absent from the lives of Anne's adopted children.

Of course, Anne did not adhere to the same strict diet that she forced upon her children. Nor, did she follow the fad diets that she proscribed for her adult followers. For instance, at different times Anne introduced grape or apple diets or the Pritikin[23] diet to her followers, never adhering to them herself (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 66). Anne's lack of regimented diet highlights just one of many differences between her lifestyle and the lives that her followers and adopted children lived.

Hunger

Owing to the meager diet of the children in The Family, they were constantly hungry. In fact, Sarah titled chapter five of her book "The Hungry Years." The children, however, developed methods of dealing with their intense hunger. First, they scavenged for whatever food they could find. For example, they ate dirt, leaves, scraps from the garbage and the compost, as well as scraps or crumbs from the kitchen floor. They also ate the seeds and moldy bread scraps that the aunties left out for the birds (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 64-67). In addition, when the children were allowed outside they would eat any plant that was edible— grass, honey suckle, and nasturtium (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 67). At times, they would even eat the cats' and dogs' food (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 82). Because animals were souls in transition

[23] Nathan Pritikin developed the Pritikin diet in the 1960s. It is a diet based on whole grain foods and minimal meat consumption (see www.pritikin.com).

according to group belief, members treated them as enlightened beings. The cats especially ate better than did the children or the aunties, eating cooked chicken and fish, while the dogs often had steaks (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995:82).

In addition to scavenging, the children also created a black-market bartering system for food. They would trade whatever they could for food. For example Sarah indicates:

> Because of our constant hunger, we had developed a bartering system, a kind of black[-]market where anything could be swapped for food. For instance [,] one biscuit was worth two big apples, or three small ones, or ten vitamin Cs, or a handful of raisins; it all depended on the rarity of the currency (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 53).

The inventiveness of the children functioned to stave off some of their symptoms of hunger. Despite their scavenging and bartering, however, they still were undernourished.

Anouree Crawford, who was raised in the group, has come forward recently with allegations of cruel and inhumane practices against Anne Hamilton-Byrne. Crawford supports Sarah Hamilton-Byrne's allegations of dietary restriction and deprivation. Crawford situates the food restriction that she experienced as a child in the context of control issues within the group, saying, "Basically food deprivation was a daily event. The reason for the deprivation was to control us, to make us weak and to feed us the most minimal amount of protein….. We were always hungry [;] we stole food everyday" (Crawford quoted in Topsfield, 2004).

Cassandra

Due to the extremely restrictive diet of the children in The Family, some younger children developed swollen and bloated stomachs due to malnutrition and protein deficiency (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 78). Anne, however, saw her children's bloated stomachs as a sign of obesity and further restricted food for them. According to Sarah Hamilton-Byrne, the aunties almost starved to death one little girl named Cassandra. At the time that officials intervened in the group and removed the children to state care, Cassandra was 12 years old and weighed the same amount as a 5 year old should (under 20 kilograms [Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 182]).

Cassandra was emaciated, and as such she had extremely low energy, was lethargic, and was generally non-responsive (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 77). Indeed, the aunties restricted Cassandra's food intake to such an extent that she at times fell into comas that were most likely the result of severe hypoglycemia (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 78). To deter the children from giving Cassandra their own food, the aunties told the children that if they gave it to her, then she would become ill (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 77).

Due to her controlled diet, Cassandra developed symptoms of psychosocial short stature (PSS). PSS is a condition of failed growth in children that results from psychological or physical trauma during developmental years. Several theories exist to explain PSS, however, ". . . in virtually all cases the relationship between the child and the primary care-giver (which is usually the mother) is seriously disturbed. Additionally, these children are often physically abused and emotionally maltreated and come into a category of suffering significant harm" (Iwaniec, 2004: 51).

Generally, PSS results in inhibited growth due to a failure to produce growth hormone or merely failure to grow due to starvation (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 182; Iwaniec, 2004: 51). Interestingly, when state officials removed the children from the abuse environment of the Family and gave them a normal diet, Cassandra grew eleven inches in one year (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 182).

Returning to Turner's (1996) discussion of familial feeding as ". . . an act of care and support. . ." (Turner, 1996: 197), in the instance of Cassandra, it seems that Anne (via the aunties) neglected Cassandra both physically and emotionally. Interestingly, Anne restricted Cassandra's diet because she misattributed Cassandra's swollen stomach as a sign of fat.

Weighing/body image

According to Sarah, Anne Hamilton-Byrne was obsessed with body image and weight. Once a week, sometimes more frequently, the aunties would weigh the children and pass on the information to Anne (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 22). Sarah Hamilton-Byrne said of this experience:

> Weighing was a very serious business—particularly serious for us because if it was considered that we were putting on too much weight we would have our food rations cut down and that was a dreadful proposition, food being the most important thing in our lives. We girls viewed the scales with hatred. They made our miserable lives even worse. Some of the girls would even try to induce vomiting on weighing mornings in an attempt to seem lighter (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 22).

(Self-induced vomiting is a characteristic of bulimia, and although my model is concerned primarily with anorexic-like behaviour, it is worth noting these instances of other disordered eating habits.) Weighing oneself obsessively, sometimes multiple times daily, is a common trait of anorexics (MacSween, 1995: 221). It is interesting that Anne was not weighing herself, but the bodies of her adoptive children.

Sarah Hamilton-Byrne hypothesizes that her adoptive mother cast her own unhealthy body images onto her adoptive children (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 101). This hypothesis supports my imposed anorexia model, since Anne Hamilton-Byrne struggled with her own weight and her own negative self-image. Instead of limiting her own food intake and dealing with her own weight issues, she instead made her adopted children the outlet of her own self-regimentation. She made her children's under-nourished and anorexic-looking bodies surrogates of her own body, apparently which she could not regulate. Restricted eating in The Family, therefore, almost certainly interconnected with Anne's own body image and psychological mindset in relation to food control issues.

Discipline and Punishment

Despite the already limited diet of the children in the Family, Anne used dietary restrictions as a method of discipline as well as a form of punishment. Most infractions of rules set out in Mummy's Rulebook included some form of food deprivation as punishment. For example, the punishment for children who stayed up after their designated bedtime was that they missed meals (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 33). Moreover, missing meals was the aunties' most common method of reprimand.

The children could miss meals for any behaviour from wearing miss-matched socks to getting clothes dirty or wetting the bed (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 21; 47; 172).

Sarah recalls one instance where the aunties, acting on Anne's orders, denied her and her sister, Andrea, food for three or four days because they wore nail polish. Sarah recollects one of the aunties asking Anne if she could give Sarah and Andrea some food, as they had not eaten in three days. Anne's reply was 'no,' but the aunty purposely left the fruit store open and ignored the missing fruit the next day (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 61). In this instance, the aunty did not outright disobey Anne's orders but indirectly managed to disobey. According to Sarah, this kind of rule- bending was a rare occurrence.

A large amount of the punishments that the children received was for stealing food. The irony was that the children stole food because of their intense hunger, yet if the aunties caught them the punishment would usually be food deprivation (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 66). Furthermore, the aunties were intent on ensuring that no one disobeyed their punishments, so they went to extremes to make sure that no one had eaten if they were on a food deprivation punishment. Sarah recalls vomiting after two or three days of not eating anything, and the aunties searched through the vomit in order to guarantee that she had in fact not eaten anything (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 65-66). The behaviour of the aunties in attempting to starve the children as a form of punishment, speaks to the total control that they had over the children. Of course, the control that the aunties had over children was in actuality Anne's control over the children and their bodies simply mediated or enforced by them.

In his discussion of body ownership, Turner (1996) argues that body possession is not always equivalent to body ownership. For example, he observes:

> Like other phenomena in the environment, I can touch, feel, smell and see my body. However, I require my body in order to carry out this touching, feeling, smelling, and seeing. In exercising control through embodiment, I have immediate and first-order possession over my body in a way which I do not experience with other objects (Turner, 1996: 220).

Turner goes on to analyze the situation of women within patriarchy, and contends that women may possess their bodies, but ultimately they do necessarily own them (Turner, 1996: 220). I extend Turner's argument to include children living in a totalitarian environment. In this case, the children in The Family possessed their bodies but within the pseudo-familial structure of their childhood, they had almost no claims to ownership over their bodies. In addition, they had no ownership over their hunger, appetites, or even their bodily output (in this case vomit).

Moreover, another way that the group functioned to control the bodies of the children was to force them to take drugs. Part of the group's belief system included the use of drugs to create an altered state of reality. Each group member took drugs as form of initiation into the Family. Next, I examine the use of drugs in the Family; in particular, I consider how Anne used drugs to gain complete control over the minds and bodies of her adopted children.

Drugs

The children in the Family often took several different forms of medications or drugs without any medical justification. For example, Sarah describes how the

aunties gave each child an astonishing amount of vitamins and other tablets several times daily:

> For a period of about six years our daily vitamin dose was staggering. Each day we had to take twenty-eight yeast tablets, twelve kelp, two vitamin C, two white and one oily vitamin E, one desiccated liver and half a B-forte tablet. We took this does two and three times a day (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 72).

In addition to vitamins, the aunties also gave the children large amounts of tranquilizers. Sometimes the children were aware that they had taken tranquilizers, but at other times they were not informed. The aunties simply crushed the tranquilizers into the children's food (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 71; 178). In these instances the aunties, following Anne's orders, drugged the children in order to calm them down and ultimately to gain a better sense of control over the children's less alert bodies and minds.

In addition to the large amounts of vitamins and prescription drugs that they consumed, the group gave the children illegal drugs. In particular, the group used LSD in order to elicit religious feelings during initiation into the group. The Family referred to this initiation as 'going through,' and "[i]t was meant to 'clear' our [members'] souls and take us to a higher plane of understanding" (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 71). Typically, children did not undergo this rite of passage until their early teenage years. The process of going through involved Anne giving the initiate LSD and acid after depriving him or her of sleep for several days beforehand (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 142). The process of going through could last several days, while Anne kept the initiate in a LSD induced delusional state.

Ultimately the purpose of the LSD was to put the initiate into a hallucinatory state until he or she acknowledged and accepted Anne as his or her guru and as the lord incarnate (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 143). In this instance, Anne had absolute control over her followers. They were in a state of dependency upon her because she decided when they had sufficiently 'gone through' and therefore she alone decided when she would stop giving them LSD.

Anne also used LSD within the Newhaven psychiatric hospital, which the group ran for a time. In this situation, similar to going through, Anne kept the patients in an LSD induced state and exploited their hallucinatory state of mind by visiting them and claiming to be Jesus Christ:

> The hallucinatory effects of the drug where well exploited. If you didn't have a guilt complex or a hang-up before you went through, you were sure to have one by the time they had finished with you. Sexual hang-ups were a cult specialty. Through your drug-induced haze Anne appeared God-like— she even said she was Jesus Christ— and you realized she offered you a way to attain the true potential of your spirituality. You would repent of the things you had confessed and realize that only through Anne could you ever expect redemption (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 126).

Anne gave her followers drugs initially to bring them into the group, and to gain a sense of control over them.

The instance of her adopted children however is slightly different. They did not choose to be in The Family; rather Anne adopted them into the group at a young age or as infants. Therefore, their going through occurred after several years of living

in the group. Consequently, the children did not choose to join the group nor did they choose (in the same manner as new adult members) to undergo a drug-induced initiation. This is a further illustration of the unchecked power that Anne held over her adopted children.

Conclusion

I characterize Anne Hamilton-Byrne as an ideological leader who used dietary restriction to gain control of her followers, in particular, her adopted children who ultimately had no choice in joining the group. Specifically, Anne did not always enforce dietary restrictions herself; rather she had a group of dedicated servants to carry out her orders. In this manner, I argue that Anne imposed a mediated form of anorexia through her followers, whom she ordered to do her bidding.

The millenarian structure of the group, in addition to the charismatic privileged position of Anne it, allowed for her followers to obediently carry out her tasks. Anne was their master and ultimately members believed that she was responsible for their salvation and whether they would survive the holocaust. As well, Anne as their master reputedly could show them the path to enlightenment and to *nirvana*. One could conclude then that the aunties, who carried out Anne's restrictive dietary orders for her adopted children, were merely pawns who felt obligated to follow Anne's commands.

Anne therefore imposed dietary control through the aunties who I refer to as mediators. Anne imposed an extreme regimentation on her children's bodies. She accomplished her regimentation with various methods of dietary deprivation— for

example, using food deprivation as a form of punishment and discipline—and providing a nutritionally inadequate diet.

The pseudo-familial structure of the group allows for distinct analogies to family theories of government and regimentation that are perhaps useful in explicating this extreme form of manipulation. Turner's (1996) contention, for example, that families generally use food as an intimate form of bonding is problematic within this group. In fact, the group used food in the opposite manner. Whereas food should be nourishment and the act of feeding should be an act of caring and loving, within The Family the absence of food and the restricted feeding was part of a larger government of restraint.

Anne is unique among my case studies as she, according to Sarah, struggled with her own concept of body image and self esteem. Instead of dieting or becoming anorexic herself, however, she transferred that need for bodily control and satisfaction onto the bodies of her children whom she could easily control without even having to actively impose restrictions herself.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Introduction

I have attempted to demonstrate that ideological leaders use dietary restrictions as a mechanism of control at least in the three groups that I have examined. The primary aspect that unites all three case studies is that in each situation the charismatic leaders lived by their own set of rules and in general did not follow their own dietary advice, while setting out extreme rules for their followers to abide by. Moreover, due to low calorie diets, members did not adequately meet their nutritional needs within these specific NRMs.

Church Universal and Triumphant

In the case of Church Universal and Triumphant—which I use to illustrate an instance of directly imposed anorexia—Elizabeth Clare Prophet preached a low calorie, bland diet to her flock, yet she purportedly ate delicacies that her followers only could dream of eating (Paolini and Paolini, 2000: 73). In fact, Prophet kept her walk-in refrigerator locked, presumably because she was aware of the inconsistency of her teachings and because she was aware of the hunger of her followers who subsisted on substantially fewer calories than she did.

Prophet was able to assert her authority over her followers, due in part to her privileged position as an alleged messenger to the ascended masters. Moreover, within the group's belief system, otherworldly authority from the ascended masters enforced her charismatic power. Furthermore, the basis of CUT beliefs demanded that members control their physical bodies in order to evolve spiritually— a point that Clare Prophet exploited when she prescribed diets and fasts for her followers.

In effect, Clare Prophet created a state of dependence for her followers. They were dependent upon her for all of their decisions related to food and diet. A similar state of dependence occurs in individual anorexia, although in individual anorexia the anorexic is dependent on her totalizing disease— not on an external source of authority such as a charismatic leader. In this case, Clare Prophet had complete authority over her followers, much as an anorexic has a feeling of complete control over her own body.

Breatharianism

Likewise, within Breatharianism (which I use as an example of doctrinally accepted anorexia), the leader (Jasmuheen) was unable to prove that she could live without eating when ill health forced her to back out of a surveillance challenge. In her defense, she claimed that pollution had caused the air to be impure and therefore she was unable to gain the proper nutrients from air alone. Similarly, Wiley Brooks cites pollution for the reason that he has to supplement his Breatharian diet with food (Lagasse, 2002: 72).

Breatharianism is an extreme example of dietary restriction because ultimately the entire essence of the group doctrine is food restriction. In this circumstance, where followers do not necessarily live communally, social influence occurs via approved behaviour modeling. For example, Jasmuheen writes on her website how one ought to live and she claims that she lives by those same austere rules. In this situation, Jasmuheen expects Breatharians to emulate her reputed lifestyle.

Breatharianism doctrine continually stresses bodily control in order to advance spiritually in addition to gaining perfection in one's life. Thus, bodily

control through dietary control in Breatharianism is similar to bodily control in individual anorexia. In both circumstances, the goal is to gain a sense of power over the individual via control of the physical body by restricting food intake. In the situation of individual anorexia, the anorexic is attempting to govern her own personal life circumstances that she feels are out of her control. In doctrinally accepted anorexia, however, the leader is attempting to gain control over the entire life of her followers.

Therefore, in social anorexia an external agent requests dietary restriction whereas the individual anorexic drives her own disease. Individual anorexia, therefore, is ultimately an extreme form of self-control, whereas doctrinally accepted anorexia involves self-control at the instruction of an outside agent. In this regard, dietary restriction becomes an internal mechanism of control in the absence of direct external mechanisms of control such as leaders or other group members.

The Family of Anne Hamilton-Byrne

Last, in my case study of Anne Hamilton-Byrne's Family, I concluded that Anne (similar to Elizabeth Clare Prophet and Jasmuheen) did not live by the same austere rules that she had her subordinates impose upon her adopted children. In this group, Anne held the privileged position of guru, and her followers were dependent upon her guidance and advice to progress spiritually. Moreover, part of the guru/*chela* relationship involves acts of service on the part of the *chelas* for their guru. Anne, therefore, exploited this devotional service by requesting that her followers serve her by ostensibly taking care of her adopted children. By severely depriving Anne's children, the aunties were merely fulfilling what they felt were their karmic duties to

their guru. Furthermore, they were following Anne's direct and specific orders when they mistreated her children.

I argue that The Family was a form of fictive family where the children grew up believing that Anne was actually their mother. This family, however, was missing crucial components of caring and bonding that usually occurs in families, especially in relation to food and meal times. In this regard, Anne enforced what Turner (1996) refers to ". . . as an aspect of domestic government or a regime for the control of bodies" (Turner, 1996:189).

In this situation, the children did not have ownership of their bodies; indeed, Anne via her mediators, controlled and owned them. Moreover, Anne (according to her daughter) had weight and body issues of her own, which may have contributed to her need to govern her children's bodies if she was unable to effectively control her own body (Hamilton-Byrne, 1995: 101). As I noted before, Anne is unique among my case studies because she did hold her own concerns about her body. As such, I compare Anne most closely to an individual anorexic who uses diet to wield a sense of control. Anne, however, used dietary restrictions to govern her followers' bodies instead of following her own austere rules and attempting to manage her own body.

Utility of Social Model

Although I use the word 'anorexia' in the development of my model, I do not claim that all members of NRMs become anorexic. Nor do I claim that ideological leaders are anorexics or that they are trying to elicit anorexia in their followers. I use the term, anorexia, because of its association with psychological control dynamics, not because of its connotation with a thin or emaciated body. Moreover, when I use

the term anorexia to discuss diet within religious circumstances, I am following Bell (1985) and Walker- Bynum (1987), both of whom discuss medieval religious fasting in the context of anorexia. Likewise, I use the individual anorexia theory as a starting point to explore and theorize extreme diets within new religious situations.

Sociologists tend to disapprove of applying psychological theories to group phenomena, claiming that concepts applicable to individuals cannot necessarily explain the collective actions of multiple players. Social psychology, however, bridges psychology and sociology and allows one to study how individual psychology interplays with and affects group relational dynamics (Kaplan, 2000: 2766). One could argue that sociology of the body (as a sub-discipline within sociology) is theoretically rooted within social-psychology because it examines the individual body *within* society. Furthermore, sociology of the body borrows from psychological literature to explore various phenomena, such as the concept of self esteem and its relation to body image.

Additionally, as I discussed previously, I am engaging in what Wagner and Berger (1985) deemed theory proliferation when I take ideas from one theoretical arena and I use them to generate new ideas and ultimately to construct a new theory. In addition, I am certainly not the only sociologist to proliferate theory by borrowing from psychology and mental health literature. Turner (1996) uses theory proliferation to build his perspectives on sociology of the body by bringing ideas from psychiatry into his sociological discussion of anorexia (Turner, 1996:179-187). In addition, Kent (2004) engages in theory proliferation within the sociology of religion when he discusses the biopsychosocial factors of religious leaders that may contribute to social

harm for group members. In particular, Kent draws on psychiatric concepts to examine psychosocial dysfunction among some religious leaders, and demonstrates how individual pathologies translate into group behaviour via theology (Kent, 2004: 101).

Other recent studies that use a similar theoretical perspective include Raine's (2005) examination of Heaven's Gate, and Lys's (2005) discussion of Jim Jones. For example, Raine (2005) argues that Heaven Gate's leader Marshall Applewhite's mental state functioned to structure his reality. " The manifestation of Applewhite's schizophrenic symptoms in his already troubled psyche created a vast delusional landscape in which he situated himself and his followers" (Raine, 2005: 114). I am not alone, therefore, when I borrow from individual psychological theories and extend aspects of them into the arena of religious groups.

Additionally, both the individual anorexia theory and the socially imposed anorexia theory are rooted in the concept of control. Specifically, both theories stress bodily control through the control of food. By engaging in theory proliferation, I am able to draw upon the vast literature surrounding food as a mechanism of control in individual anorexia and bring it to bear in social anorexia as the instrument of members' regulation.[24]

Both the social and individual models of anorexia take place within the context of totalistic environments. While Breatharianism involves a totalistic ideology completely centered on food deprivation, the other two groups that I studied were total institutions, which Lalich (2004) characterizes such institutions as having

[24] See for example Bruch, 1978; Brumberg-Jacobs, 1988; Johnston, 1993; Lelwica, 1999; MacSween, 1995; Orbach, 1986; Szekely, 1988.

". . . interrogative procedures, removal of personal boundaries, forced and continual relations with others, and total control of time" (Lalich, 2004: 253). These institutions govern every aspect of the individual's life. A parallel situation occurs in individual anorexia. It is not, however, a total institution that structures the daily life of the individual, but rather the disease of anorexia provides the all-consuming totality. Thus, in both circumstances, either a totalistic religion or a totalistic disease controls the individual.

Additionally, a highly structured dietary environment exists in both individual and socially imposed anorexia. Individuals give up control of their basic need— food. One could argue that anorexics are still in control of their diets, but, as the disease of anorexia progresses, the individuals are less able to rationally govern their decisions. As MacSween notes:

> [A]norexia can be described as a two-stage process, in which the symptom is at first consciously set in motion by a strongly perceived self which imposes control on appetite but subsequently 'escapes' the conscious control of the anorexic woman and 'takes her over.' Anorexia itself, then, comes to be perceived as a force separate from, but internal to the anorexic woman. 'The anorexia' controls her behaviour; she is powerless in the face of her illness and cannot reverse the process which she herself set in motion (MacSween, 1995: 238, emphasis added).

Likewise, within the totalistic structured environment of many NRMs, individuals become increasingly reliant on their leaders (or the leaders' subordinate) for every

decision, including ones related to diet. In both circumstances, therefore, a state of dependence develops, either upon leaders or upon a disease.

However useful the model was in highlighting issues of control-through-diet that occurs in some new religions, it also has its limitations. First, it is difficult if not impossible to determine the mental state of the leaders whom I have discussed. I cannot prove that these leaders have issues with their own body-images or even anorexic-like thought-patterns in relation to food (even though some evidence certainly points in this direction). Furthermore, it would be nearly impossible to conduct voluntary psychological interviews with these individuals in order to ascertain their personal opinions about their bodies. With nothing to gain and much to loose from interview results, few if any leaders would consent to them.

Third, I cannot clearly determine to what extent group members feel secure or insecure about their bodies and their dietary habits. Likewise, this model does not explain how members might feel about giving up control of their food intake to their religious leader. Moreover, individual circumstances vary greatly. Therefore, I cannot generalize that all people will experience external dietary restrictions in the same manner. Future research might attempt to get at some of these issues, through former member interviews, and if so perhaps the patterns and findings of this study will assist researchers in their efforts.

Suggestions for Further Research

I do not purport to generalize to other NRMs, although I speculate that similar dietary issues may be at work in some other groups. In my readings of NRMs, I have stumbled across small, seemingly insignificant mentions of food related issues

in several sources. For example, Chidester (1988) and Reiterman and Jacobs (1982) mention the role of diet in their respective studies of Jim Jones's 'utopian' community of Jonestown. Throughout Reiterman and Jacobs's book they mention several incidents involving food. For example, they note an instance when Jones used food deprivation as a form of punishment: "In one case, a child who defecated in his pants was forced to wear the soiled garments on his head and go without food while watching others eat" (Reiterman and Jacobs, 1982: 349). Jonestown is perhaps one of the most significant examples of an ideological group where the followers held such reverence for their charismatic leader that ultimately they knowingly killed themselves on his say. Furthermore, the manner of suicide involved ingestion of a poisoned drink (Reiterman and Jacobs, 1982: 559). Thus far, however, sociologists have overlooked the significance of food as a mechanism of control— to the point of murder/suicide in Jonestown.

Another group that held unusual rules concerning food and diet is Heaven's Gate. Members committed mass suicide in 1997 after they believed that they had readied their bodies for transportation to another planet. Again, similar to the mass suicide at Jonestown, the manner of suicide involved ingestion of poison (Lalich, 2004: 96). Heaven's Gate (1986) published its dietary principles in a book titled *Transfiguration Diet* in which members laid out their various rules surrounding food.[25] For example, the book includes lists of foods to avoid and foods to consume in addition to a detailed daily diet referred to as a "sample consuming schedule." The sample consuming schedule suggests drinking various concoctions throughout the day, such as "6:00 am— Cayenne, 1tsp. in 4 to 6 oz. water, then chase with more

[25] I thank Robert Balch for sending me a copy of *Transfiguration Diet.*

water, 6:10 am— Molasses, 1- ½ tbls., 6:25 am— Wheat germ oil, 1-1/2 tbls" (Littlegreen, 1986: 88-89).

Another group that deserves scholarly attention is The Disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ led by Samantha Roy (formerly known as Rama Behera). Roy teaches a strict brand of Christianity, which involves extremes of fasting and bingeing. For example, one former member, Eugene Baugh, describes how he lost critical amounts of weight during his time in Roy's group due to Roy's prescribed fasts:

> I was gradually literally starving. In a year [,] I shed 60 pounds. At 6'5" tall I weighed 150 pounds. I had a 32" waist. My arms and legs were no more than skin stretched tight over bone. I could count my ribs. Beyond this precipitous loss of weight, I also experienced the other physical effects of starvation. I was disorientated, clinically depressed and overcame lethargy by expending large measures of psychic energy (Baugh, 2000: 39; quoted in Meikle, 2005: 50).

Baugh was significantly underweight because of Roy's dietary regulations and enforced fasts.

In addition to severe fasts, Roy also reportedly forced his followers to eat large quantities of spicy Indian food. When they could not finish the large portions, Roy left the food un-refrigerated until the next weekend when he demanded that his followers eat the now spoiled food (Lane, 2001: 3). Former members recount becoming sick from eating rotten food at which time Roy demanded that they eat their vomit so as not to waste God given sustenance (Giese, 2001: 3). Other than my

(2005) short examination of Roy's group, no other scholarly investigation of this group exists to date.

Just based on well known groups such as Jonestown and Heaven's Gate, the fact that no one has substantively studied the phenomenon of food control in high demand groups is astonishing. In-depth studies, therefore, of high demand groups should examine the role that diet plays in the social interactions of their leaders and members. Moreover, the model of social anorexia may be useful in examining power relations between leaders and followers in relation to food and body. In particular, studies should consider how ideological leaders create a state of dietary dependence for their followers that is similar to an anorexic's own state of disease dependence. For instance, followers are completely dependent on the totalizing environment of their religion just as anorexics are entirely dependent on the totalizing aspects of their all-encompassing disease.

One dimension of these studies could involve examinations of the motivations of leaders who enforce or suggest dietary restriction for their followers. Such examinations might help unravel the difficult question about whether dietary restrictions function to increase leader control or whether it merely reflects control that the leader already holds. Moreover, why do some leaders feel the need to control their followers in this manner? Is it a form of narcissism or mental illness[26] that causes these people to strive for control over others? Alternatively, do they actually believe in their spiritual assertions and claims about food deprivations? Certain one could answer these questions easily, but researchers must try if they want to better

[26] See Kent, 2004 for a discussion of the biopsychosocial factors of religious leaders that may contribute to potential dangers.

understand issues related to charisma and social control.

Complementary research also needs to examine members' experiences within these high demand groups around food restrictions. Specifically, do members perceive their restricted diets as either harmful or beneficial, or do they reflect upon their diet at all? Additionally, do followers who are subjected to extreme dietary restraints ever develop eating disorders?[27] Do unhealthy body image issues arise in these situations?

Most likely, in-depth interviews might shed some light on some of these unanswered questions. It is difficult, however, to gain access to both leaders and members of these types of groups, because they see outsiders as suspect. Nevertheless, these questions are worth investigating in attempts to understand further the social significance of dietary restriction.

[27] Kliger's discussion of the Sri Chinmoy group suggests that sometimes followers do develop eating disorders. Kliger notes that approximately 10% of the women in the Sri Chinmoy community became anorexic due to the high demands that their guru placed on them to achieve and maintain an ideal body weight (Kliger, 1994: 234).

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